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NELLY

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PIMP JUICE!
CHESS!

"WE ALMOST KILLED EACH OTHER"

THE USED

MODEST MOUSE

NAS

R. KELLY

#1 IN A SERIES
ROCK STARS IN CHICKEN SUITS!
p88

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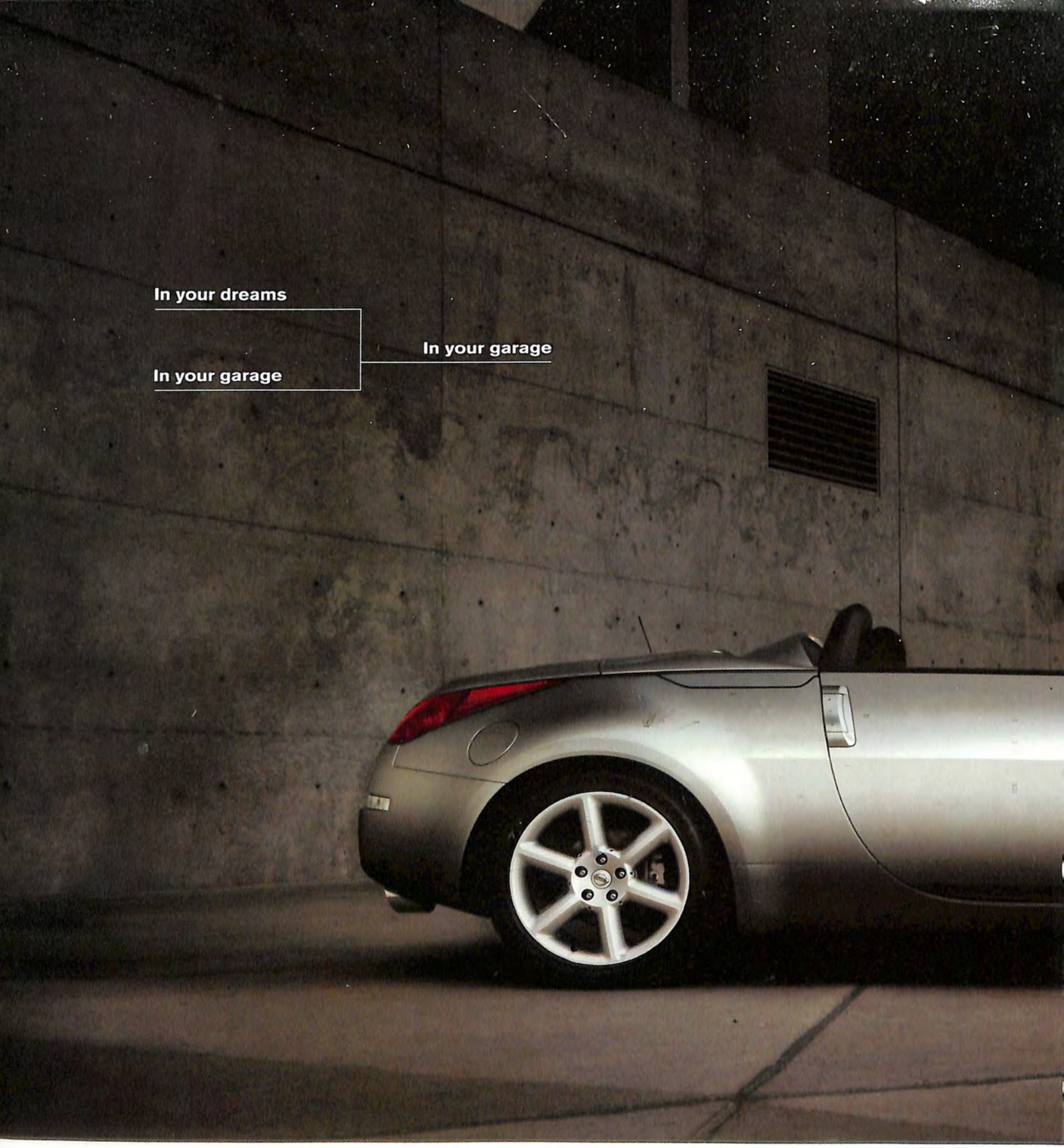

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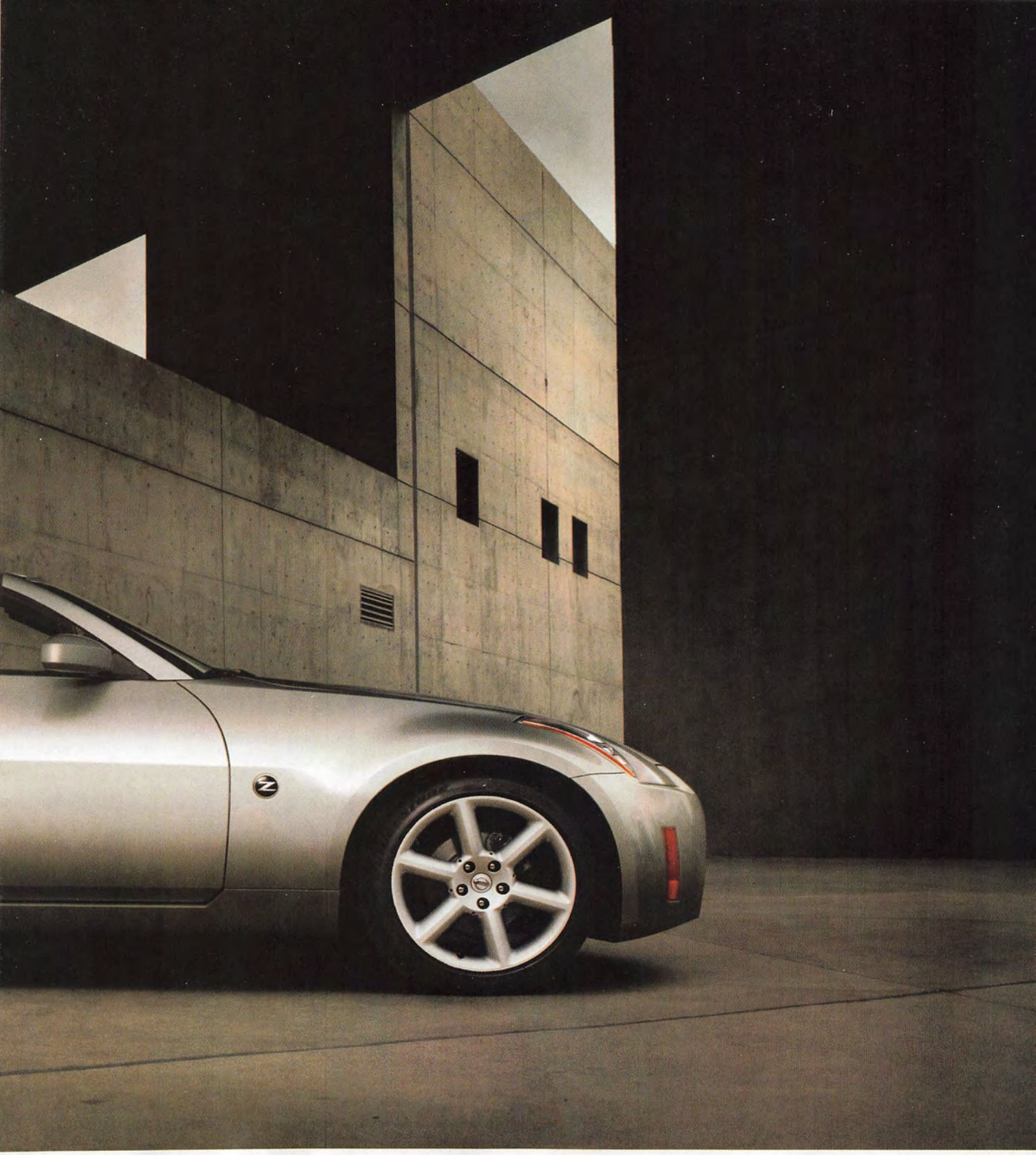

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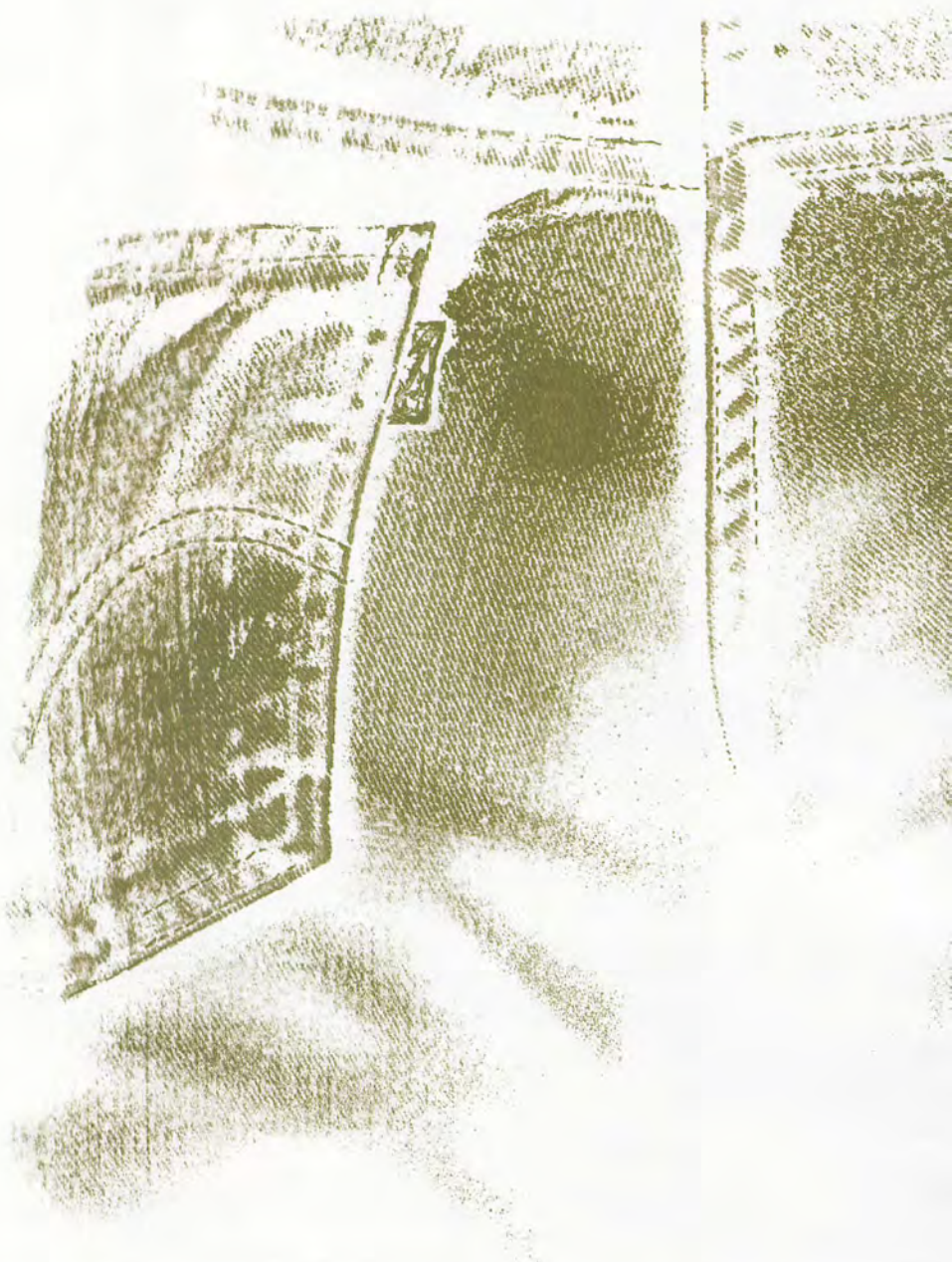

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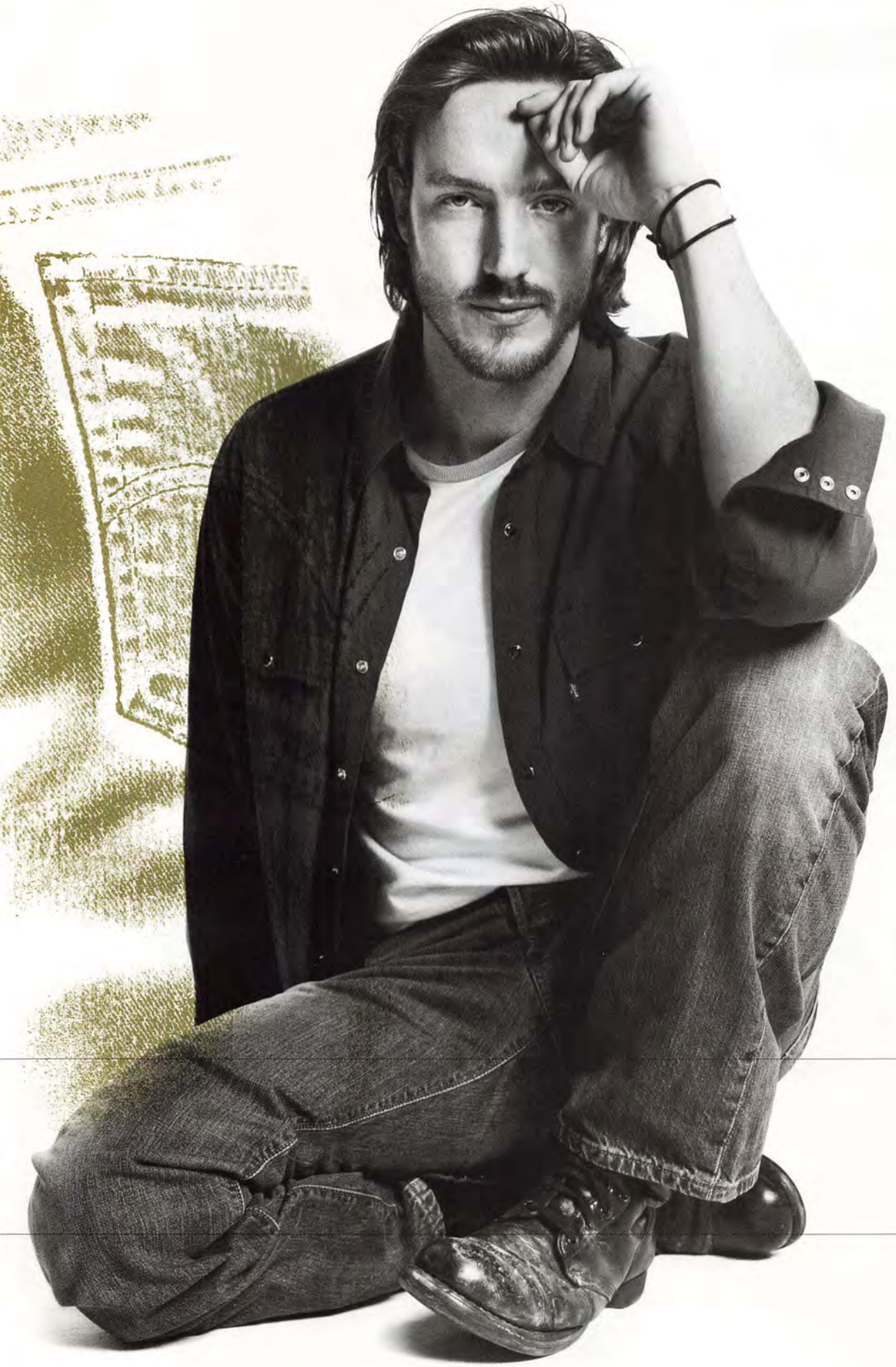

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New York's hard-boiled rap laureate now favors life's gentler pleasures: imported Cubans, long walks in the park with his fiancée, Kelis, and oil painting. *Wha?*

70 **THE USED**
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"I no longer relate to lollipops." HILARY DUFF

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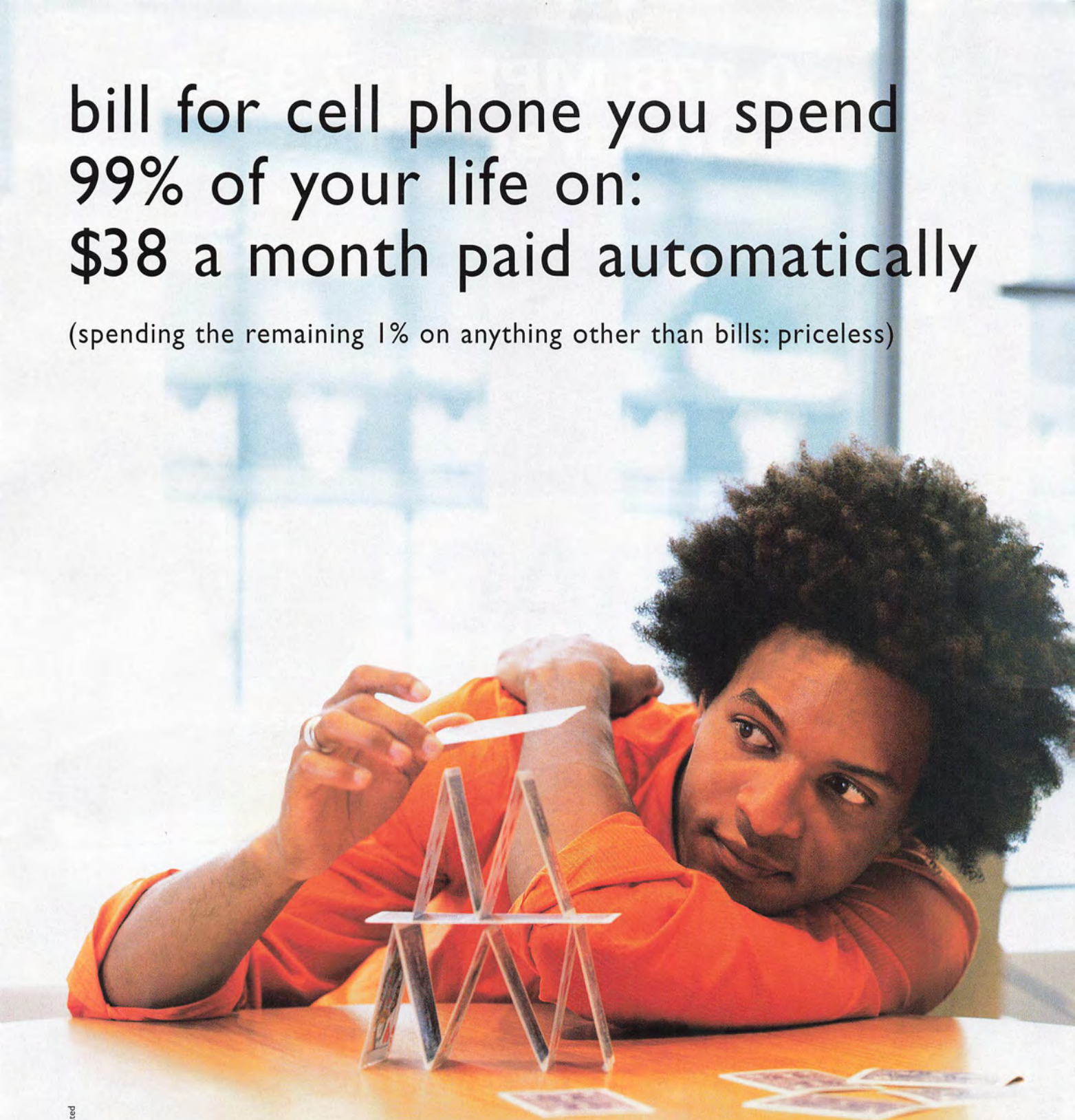

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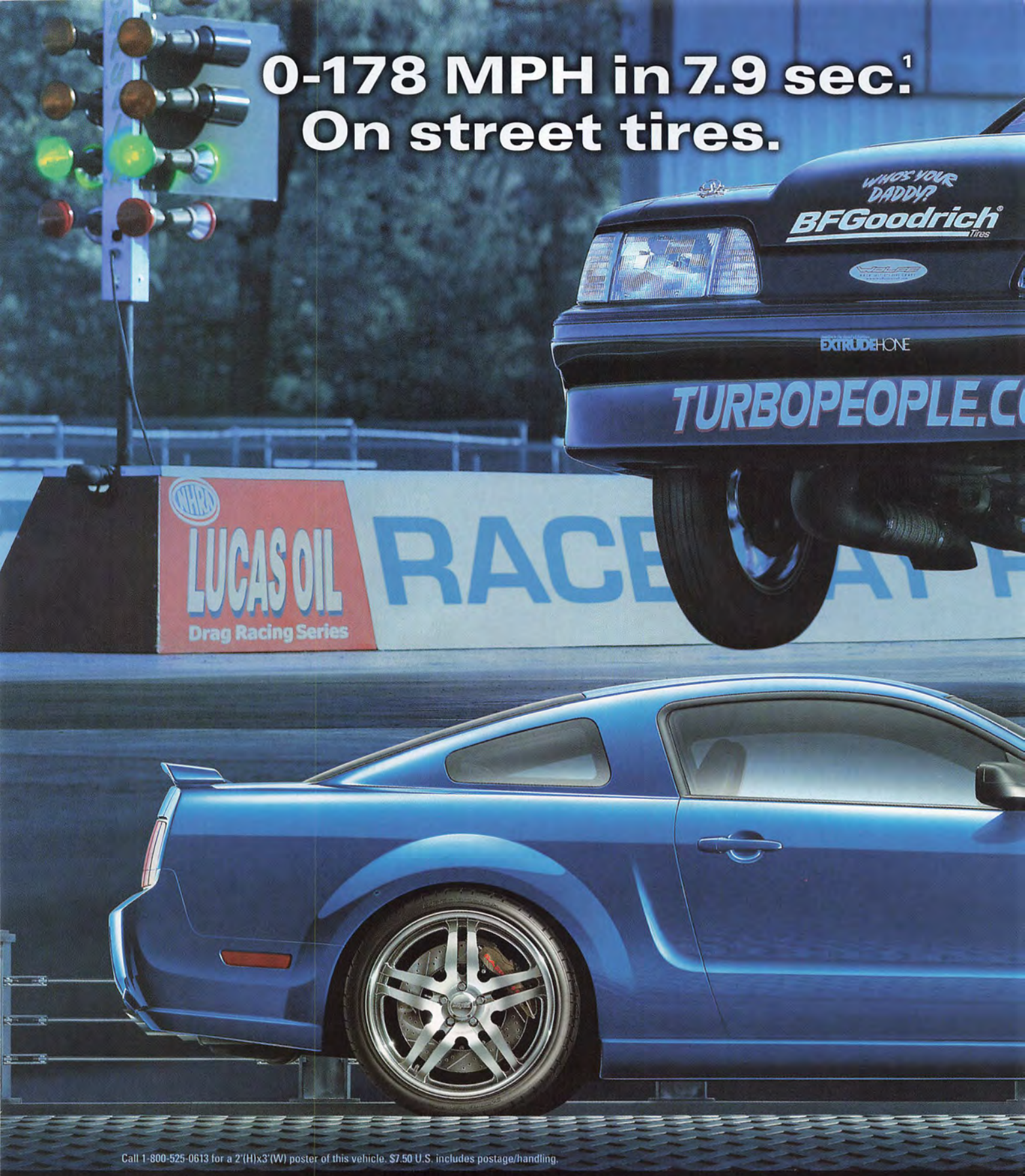

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Import: Paul Efantis 8.25 @ 170.9 MPH on 10/05/03.

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"I'll do anything for attention." KATY PERRY

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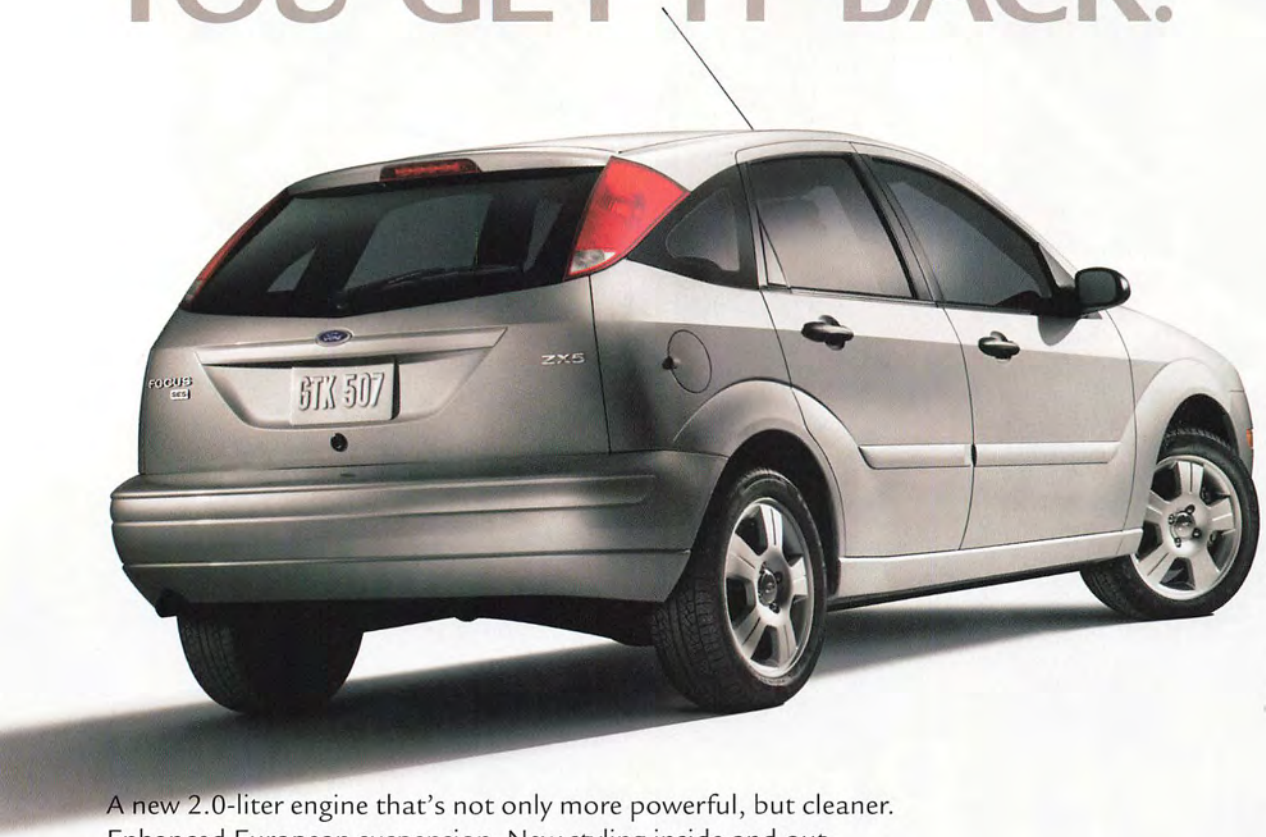

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Kerstin Rodgers/Redferns/Retna Ltd.

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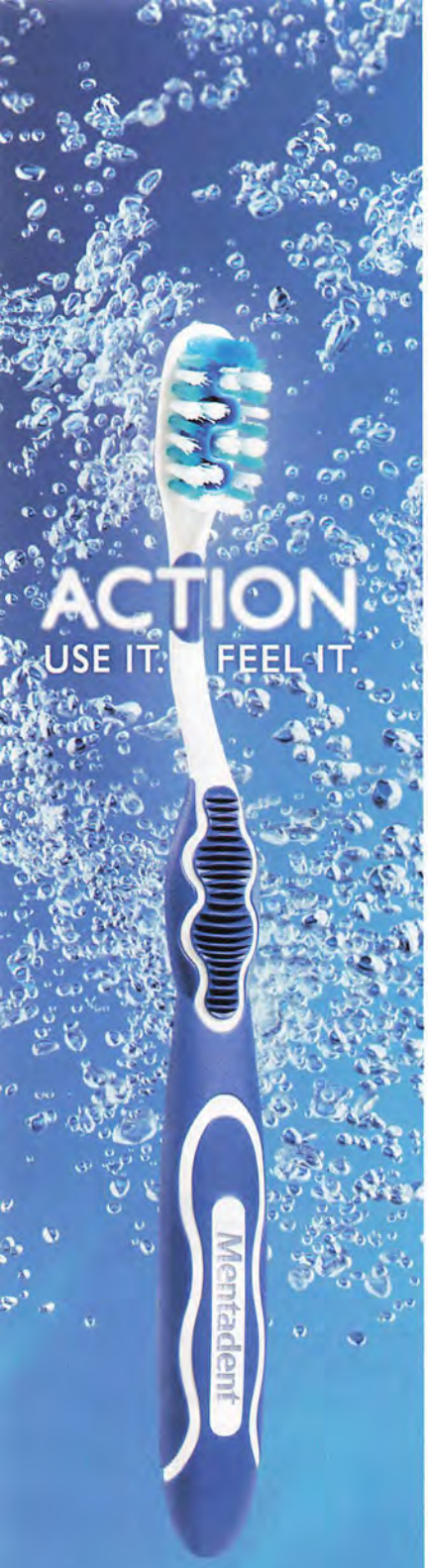

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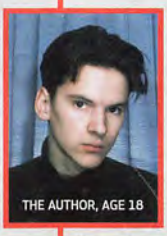

THE AUTHOR, AGE 18

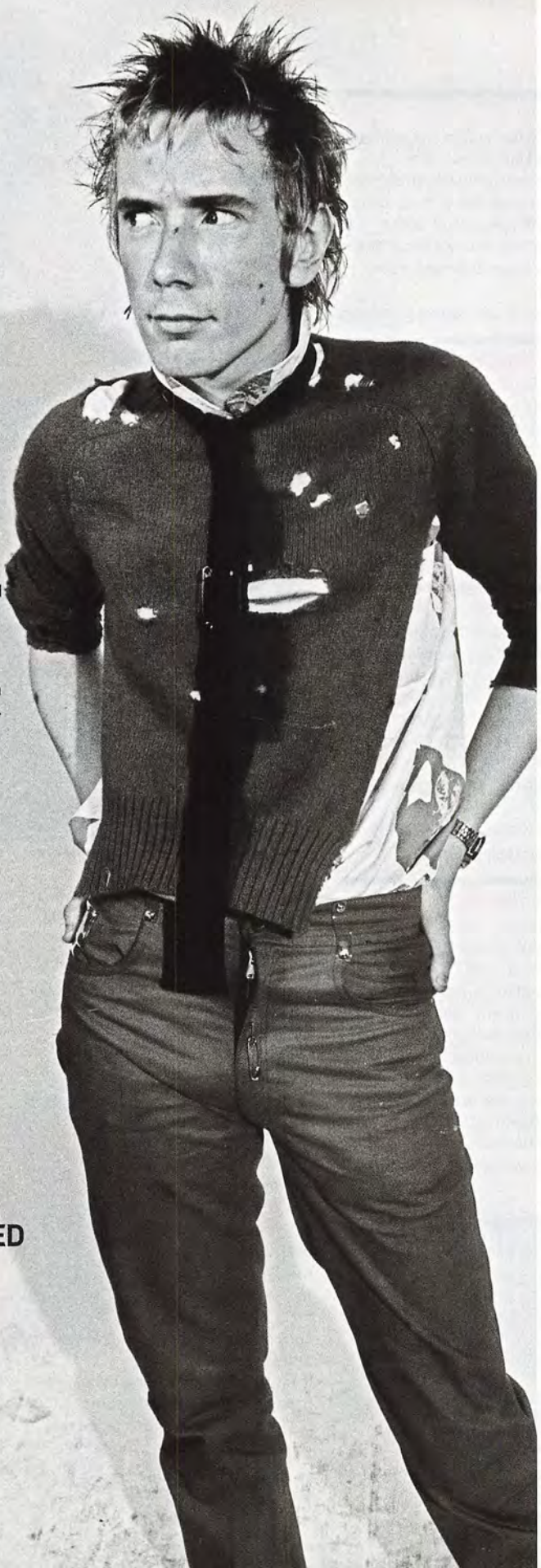
What is a teen moment? As an ever-youthful magazine editor, I have some expertise in this area. Although not as much — nor in the same realm — as my old drinking buddy R. Kelly.

For older *Blender* readers, a teen moment is when adolescent zest and vim prevail. It's when the energy of the under-20s bubbles over to create an irresistible slice of perfect pop. Think about Elvis Presley walking into Sun Studios to record "That's All Right," or a 19-year-old Johnny Rotten auditioning for the Sex Pistols in front of svengali Malcolm McLaren.

What makes these moments all the more remarkable is the fact that most of the teenagers I know are incapable of getting off the sofa. And even if they can get off their asses, they are unwilling to go down to the local deli to fetch my beer and smokes.

Perhaps youth really *is* wasted on the young. Or perhaps not. Whatever. Hey, pass the remote!

ANDY PEMBERTON
EDITOR IN CHIEF



PERHAPS YOUTH REALLY *IS* WASTED ON THE YOUNG.

Richard Young/Rex USA (Johnny Rotten)

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You've Got Mail

WE WANT YOU TO SHARE . . .

DUFF LYRICS

I just wanted to say that I recognized those Hilary Duff lyrics in the Gretchen Wilson interview on the last page of the magazine — "If you can't do the math/Then get out of the equation" — from Hilary's song "The Math." I can't wait until next issue comes out!

SARAH KALLMAN, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA

FAREWELL, SUPERSTAR

Thank you, *Blender*, for commemorating the life of John Whitehead with the "Ain't no stoppin' us now" lyric that appeared on the spine of the September issue. I was so saddened to hear about the tragic and untimely death of the R&B superstar. He will be missed.

JULIETTE McGRATH, DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA

NEPOTISM RULES!

I can't believe that Ashlee Simpson got a record deal *and* her own reality TV show just because she's the little sister of the super-famous Jessica Simpson. What can we expect next? People being "elected" president of the United States just because they happen to be related to a previous incumbent?

LARA MARTINELLI, DARIEN, CONNECTICUT

Now you're just being stupid.

CRAZY-ASS TROUBLE

If I were in Usher's position, with hot and cold booty on tap, I can't imagine the crazy-ass trouble I would get into all the time. Actually, I can imagine, which is exactly why I don't feel too envious of him. But congratulations to the man for keeping things so cool. He even feels bad about paying for someone's new breasts. I'm sure the French have a word for that, those crazy bastards.

ZACK MICHELINE, JOHNSON CREEK, WISCONSIN

★ Congratulations to the winner of *Blender*'s June/July Crossword contest, who walks away with a bitchin' Paradigm home-theater system: Nancy German of Seattle! *Yeah!*

LISTEN UP!

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Ashlee Simpson: "Mom?! Jessica stole my chair again!"

REAL SEX!

Your article about the British movie in which there are actors having real sex stated that it wasn't just some male fantasy, but in fact there was "equal opportunity" nudity. However, you only had a picture of the female half-naked. Where's the equal opportunity for us women? I think this would be the perfect time to bring back that Moby-sock picture. Thank you for listening.

NANCY McDONALD, ALTON, ILLNOIS

I LOVE JANET

I'm a deployed Army reservist in Kuwait. We run support missions to Iraq for combat units. I just picked up a copy of *Blender* for the first time and fell in love. Janet is so fine! Great choice. I have become a *Blender* believer. Enclosed is a photograph of me and Janet's fabulous cover. Peace out.

SGT. NICK "O.B." OBRADOVICH, APO, AE, KUWAIT

Sgt. Nick Obradovich and *Blender*

I AM SICK

I'd just like to say that I don't believe Ashlee Simpson's claim that she has a "great rack." I demand proof!

MARC JAMES, YAKIMA, WASHINGTON

Two words, dude: cold shower.

I AM MIDDLE-AGED

I'm writing in response to Rob Crozier, who referred to himself as an "old geezer" in the magazine and wrote that he (like me) will be 40 in September. I offer this list of a few of the people who appear to still be able to kick up their heels, despite their tragically advanced years: Chris Cornell, 40; Anthony Kiedis, 42 in November; Liz Phair, 37. Middle-aged? Sure. Geezers? Why don't we ask all of the 18 year olds who are still head-banging at their gigs? You're only a geezer if you think you are, Rob.

EMILY HAUSER, OAK PARK, ILLINOIS →

Top: Sheryl Nields

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Avril Lavigne. Or is it? Actually, yes, it is.

I STINK

Can I just say that if Avril Lavigne *does* release a perfume that combines the smell of Jägermeister, tequila and armpits, I won't be buying it. Most of the time that's what I smell like anyway.

GEOFF WINDOLF, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

That was *you* standing next to us on the subway this morning?

I WANT TO HAVE SEX WITH YOU!

OK, if you post one more "If you were a woman, I'd marry you" or "I want to have hot sweaty sex with you" letter from a reader, I'm going to smack you over the head with a rolled-up competitor's magazine! It's bad enough people can't come up with something original, but then you reward them by publishing them and giving them the prize that should rightfully be mine?! I, for one, won't marry you or have sex with you, but I'm still pickin' up your 'zine, because it's great.

AMANDA HOSKINS, LAUGHLIN, NEVADA

Skye Sweetnam glues her hair to the wall. Who knows why?

BEAT ME UP

I was really enjoying your latest issue. Then all of that was ruined for me when I read that Skye Sweetnam had, as a kid, gone to a pop stars camp. The sad thing is that my parents sent me to Beat-the-Crap-Out-of-Kyle camp. Her camp sounds a lot more fun.

KYLE CREGG, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Oddly, we remember Beat-the-Crap-Out-of-Kyle camp being a lot of fun. But, then, none of us is called Kyle.

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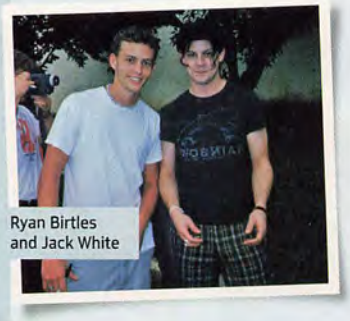
Philip Gross and Neil Young

Justin Hawkins and Lindsey Meier



Ryan Birtles and Jack White

Matt Wolfe and Sammy Hagar

Albert Villanueva and Jennifer Lopez

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FUN WHILE IT LASTED

After reading the August issue, I was amused for days with the story of Bill Graham unknowingly taking acid. I mistakenly thought it was about evangelist Billy Graham. I didn't realize my blunder until I showed the article to a friend. It never occurred to me why the hell Billy Graham would be hanging out with the Grateful Dead. Oh well, it was fun while it lasted! I still love you, *Blender*!

SUZANNE ALBRIGHT, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

WHINY IDIOTS

My dearest *Blender*! I have been a devoted reader since day one. I must say that nothing delights me more than reading letters from whiny idiots who have nothing better to do than to see their name in print. I am surprised that any of these people can even read, with all of the juvenile comments they make. I don't think this magazine is for 12 year olds; it's for serious music fans, such as myself.

KENYA BERDING, BEAUMONT, TEXAS ➜

Left, top to bottom: Sheryl Nields; Kenneth Cappello

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The Libertines' Pete Doherty (with Carl Barât): "Another heroin-and-soda, please."

LONG LIVE THE LIBERTINES

A friend took me to see The Libertines at CBGB when they played in New York about a year ago and I was totally blown away by both their songs and the onstage chemistry between Pete Doherty and Carl Barât. I immediately bought their album and have played it at least once a day ever since, so I found the piece in your last issue about the band and Pete's problems utterly heartbreaking. The only consolation was Geoff Travis's claim that the last thing he is interested in is wringing some money out of them. Let's hope that's true. The last thing we need is another rock-star casualty, particularly if it involves someone as talented as he is.

MICHAEL GILL, GLADWYN, PENNSYLVANIA

ROCK MY PANTS OFF

Can I just say that you rock my face off? Well, sometimes it's my pants, but most of the time, it's my face. I think you should know that putting Dave Chappelle on the cover was a bit odd, but as long as you don't start featuring teen actors on your cover, then I am OK with the occasional thespian. I would also like to know when your birthday is, so I can buy you a mountain. This is so you can sit on top of it and the musically retarded can reach the peak where you sit and buy wisdom from you. I am loyal to you and will always be as long as there is rock & roll, because as rock & roll is my religion, *Blender* is my bible! Never stop rockin'!

ANNAMARIE "DIRTY" SANCHEZ, MESA, ARIZONA

FASCINATING!

I was fascinated by Fred Durst saying "I see too much with my eyes and feel too much with my soul." That's the way I feel, too. Also, I feel like I hear too much with my ears, particularly when it comes to really crappy limp-bizkit music.

JOLENE MARSHALL, HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

SOPHISTICATION ELUDES US

If you guys are trying to be sophisticated by quoting the title of a Marcel Proust novel in one of your stories [August, see p66], you could at least get the words right: It's "À la recherche du temps perdu" — no accents on the "E."

WILL SCHMITT, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

IDIOCY

I found your "50 Worst Songs Mailbag — At a Glance" pie chart very informative. Just goes to show a very large amount of idiotic songs are released because there is a very large percentage of idiotic people who buy and listen to them. Most wouldn't recognize a bad song if it perforated their eardrum. Thank you for spelling out what the rest of us already knew.

WALLY TROST, MANITOWOC, WISCONSIN

BLENDER SAVED ME

I just wanted to thank you for keeping me sane this summer while I'm trapped in a tiny box-office, where our only customers are Brooks & Dunn fans and that Ozzfest guy who had an epiphany while standing at the window: "If I want good seats, I should probably show up the day tickets go on sale, not four months later." If it weren't for you and that window blocking me from the customers, I would have been charged with assault months ago. Also, I'm with Andy Pemberton: The robot guy on *Chappelle's Show* kicks ass.

PATTY IMMING, IOWA CITY, IOWA

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS...

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?
Send us a photo with your name and address and who your dog is supposed to be. If we print your photo, you'll win this collection of 25 Universal DVDs, including *Dawn of the Dead (Unrated)*.

GOOD NAME FOR A BAND!

SMOOTH UP ENYA
M. BLANEY, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

WHOA! LOOK AT THIS!

Have a good name for a band? Send it to us! We'll pick the best one we get, and if it's yours, you'll win a sweet JVC satellite radio, plus three months of Sirius Satellite Radio service, on us!

Top: Roger Sargent/NME/IPC Media; Bottom, left to right: Chris Skaggs; LFI

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BLENDER TO ALL OUR FRIENDS!

NEXT ISSUE

EXCLUSIVE!

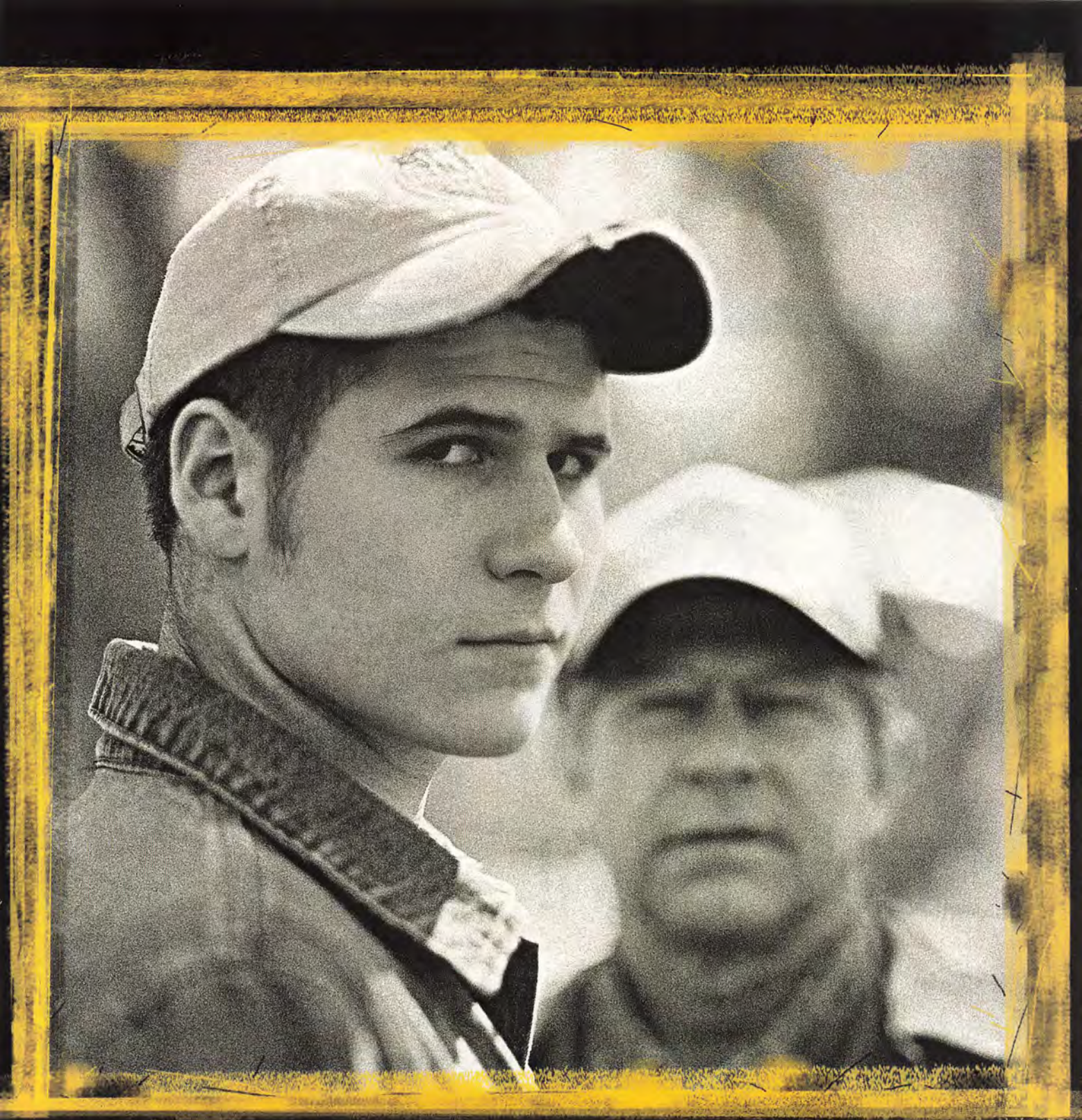
WHY EVERYBODY LOVES

U2

INSIDE THE WORLD'S FAVORITE ROCK & ROLL BAND

ON SALE TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19

Perou



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BURNER

★ NEW FLAMING LIPS! ★ LOHAN SINGS! ★ PARIS DATES EX'S BRO!

Sugar High!

Soon-to-be stepmom Britney Spears could be loading up on too much junk food, experts say

★ BRITNEY SPEARS has adopted eating habits that are alarming nutrition experts. The recently engaged superstar appears to be consuming a regimen of junk food, which professionals say could damage her long-term health.

"She is cruising for a bruising," cautions natural health-care practitioner Vidya Albrink. "A diet this high in sugar can lead to mood swings, exhaustion, anxiety and depression. It burns out your adrenals, the glands that deal with stress, and can wreck your pancreas, which leads to diabetes."

"A HIGH-SUGAR DIET CAN LEAD TO MOOD SWINGS, EXHAUSTION, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION."

The pop star has been seen consuming Red Bull energy drinks, Starbucks Frappuccinos and Marlboro Lights. On a few occasions, she's been seen eating one of her favorite snacks, Cheetos.

"Drinking beverages like Red Bull is like whipping a dead horse," explains Albrink, who suspects that pre-existing instability could have led to Spears's junk-food infatuation. "It's a quick burst of energy, then you crash. You feel worse, so you have some more; it's a vicious cycle. People usually eat this way when they are already not feeling well emotionally, physically — or both."

Spears injured her knee while filming the video for "Outrageous," the fourth single from her nearly three-times-platinum *In the Zone*. Since then, her nightly dance-performance routine on tour has stopped and she has been photographed eating junk food.

"The long-term effect of a diet like this is a body that is sluggish, not as attractive as it could be, with flabby and cottage-cheesy flesh, and not up to doing what you want it do," wellness expert Claudia Citkovitz says.

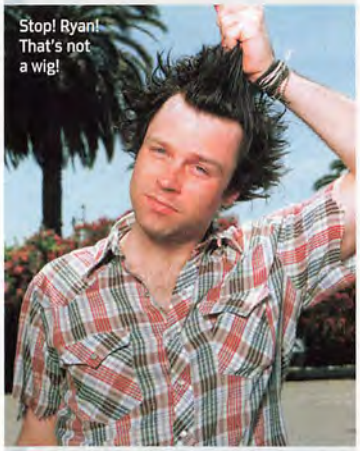
"She's going to clog up her bowels," says Dolores Perri, M.S, R.D. C.N.S., of the Alternative Health Center in New York. "She's going to be supercharged on caffeine, and she's playing havoc with her blood sugar. The nutrients [in that kind of diet] are minimal. If one of my clients came in here and said they were on that diet, I'd say, 'You've got to be kidding.' "

Spears is currently filming her first workout video, to be released in time for Christmas with the help of fitness instructor Bobby Storm. "I'll show you how to get the Spears body," Storm says. *NOEL BODDIE*

Opposite page, main: Bauer-Griffin.com; top left: Splash News. This page, left to right: Bauer-Griffin.com, Digital Splash News (inset); Splash News, Alphonse Telymonde (inset); Splash News, Splash News (inset); JFX/X17agency.com, Alphonse Telymonde (inset)

Spears has been photographed consuming stimulants and carb-heavy snacks.

WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR CROAK?


Stop! Ryan! That's not a wig!

RYAN #12 ADAMS

CURRENT AGE	30
AVERAGE AMERICAN'S LIFE EXPECTANCY	79

CATEGORY	YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED
Media overexposure and bad press	–1
Seems to feed off the bad press, which makes him stronger	+4
Stressful disagreement with label	–1
Boozy insomniac prone to rambling online diatribes	–4
Prone to wild mood swings	–3
Pot-puffer since high school	–4
Admits to having erratic diet that would choke a goat	–3
Spiritual enough to refer to his career as part of God's plan	+6
Goes heavy on the cancer sticks	–4
Career derailing injury (broken wrist) threatening guitar-playing ability	–3
ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY	66
PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH	2040

GERONTOLOGIST DR. DEMKO SAYS: "Ryan seems to be at his best when he's at his worst: family turmoil, band breakups, artistic rejection. Adversity feeds his creative hunger, which is good news, since adversity is something he's always able to produce."

NEWS ROUNDUP!

MARIAH CAREY is currently working on a children's book. "She has an idea based on her biracial heritage," said CAA agent Rob Light, confirming that the singer will not be using a ghostwriter for the project.

LINDA RONSTADT, barred from performing at the Aladdin Resort & Casino in Las Vegas for recommending MICHAEL MOORE's anti-Bush doc *Fahrenheit 9/11*, has been invited back. Since her eviction, the bankrupt hotel changed hands. New owner Robert Earl has said he would welcome her back.

GEORGE MICHAEL shut down the message board on his Web site following a dispute between fans about his latest album. He wrote, "I find it really sad to see [so many bad] . . . comments."

WORD!

"It wasn't my cooking that made my husband marry me."
JESSICA SIMPSON

Little brother Aaron, with Paris.

Nick with a new girl and a new haircut.

Sibling Rivalry?

What's this? Aaron Carter dating his brother's ex? Surely not!

★ PARIS HILTON, 22, went on a date with the brother of her ex-boyfriend, former Backstreet Boy Nick Carter, 24, after she and Nick split up.

Hilton was recently pictured at Beverly Hills' Koi Sushi with Aaron Carter, 16. As the two entered the restaurant holding hands, the *Simple Life* star told onlookers Aaron was "the more mature . . . Carter." She reunited with Nick after the dinner.

The date took place the night before Hilton appeared at L.A.'s Concorde Club with a swollen lip and bruises on her arms. According to friends, Hilton has alleged Nick Carter hit her for unspecified reasons. He denies the allegation, saying the bruises came from a photo shoot. Recently, Nick has been linked with *Playboy* Playmate Dalene Kurtis. They were seen at Mr. Chow in L.A. on August 10. NOEL BODDIE

WEIRD BAND ALERT!

CANDY BAND

Detroit moms mix kiddie music with punk. Finally!

Candy Band. Embarrassed kids not pictured.

Who are Candy Band?
Four Detroit moms who spruce up children's standards with Ramones-style ramalama. "Our 'Chim Chim Cher-ee' from *Mary Poppins* fucking rocks!" says founder Paula Messner, 40 (aka Almond Joy). "We'll do 'Mary Had a Little Lamb,' then break into Iggy Pop."

One little question: Why?
"After being in a band my whole life, having kids listening to those damn *Barney* tapes drove me crazy," Messner says. With three other moms from her YWCA, she plays birthdays, fundraisers and open-mic nights. "The drunks do *not* get us!" she says.

Any problems?
"We were rehearsing once," Messner groans, "and our kids filled the toilet with silverware." STEVE LOWE

Left, top to bottom: Sean Murphy/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; Gary French. Right, top to bottom: Flynetpictures.com; Clinton H. Wallace/Ipol/Globe Photos (inset); courtesy of Candy Band

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THE NEXT BIG THING!

Katy Perry

This pastor's daughter says she has done bad things. What kind of things?

BY NICK DURDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

"I'M COMPLETELY OUTRAGEOUS and I'll do anything for attention!" No, not the words of Paris Hilton, but the claim of a pastor's daughter.

"Music wasn't allowed in the house because it's the devil's work," says Katy Perry, a vocalist with the production team The Matrix. "And if I brought home friends, my mom wanted to know if they were Christians." Here, she laughs wildly as if someone, somewhere, just cracked a joke. "That's my parents. They're crazy! They're nuts!"

Perry, now 19, was born in Santa Barbara, and like Beyoncé, got her first taste of performance singing in church. Unlike Beyoncé, she spent her adolescence not being "your typical Christian," she says with a wicked laugh. "I've done a lot of bad things. Use your imagination."

After years singing locally, she came to the attention of The Matrix — the brain trust behind Avril Lavigne and Ricky Martin — who were assembling a group that now features Perry and British-born AKA. Their debut is a radio-friendly pop collection with Perry cast as a sunnier Avril.

"At first, I thought, 'Crap! There goes my credibility!' They've worked with some brilliant people, but also people who are hardly artists at all," she says. "But if people buy the record, that's all the credibility I need."

She's working on her solo debut (due 2005) with Morissette producer Glen Ballard. "My album will be more rock, which is probably why my parents think I'm going to hell!"

A total unknown working with the biggest names, Perry must have talent to burn. "No, I've just got really big boobs," she says. "And my sweater gets tighter every week. . . ." [BLENDER]

>>> OUT NOW THE MATRIX *COLUMBIA*

ALL ABOUT ME!

OBSESSIONS
"Paris, France; Kate Moss; lint rollers — they clean anything!"

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW BY ANY ARTIST
"Take Your Momma Out," by The Scissor Sisters

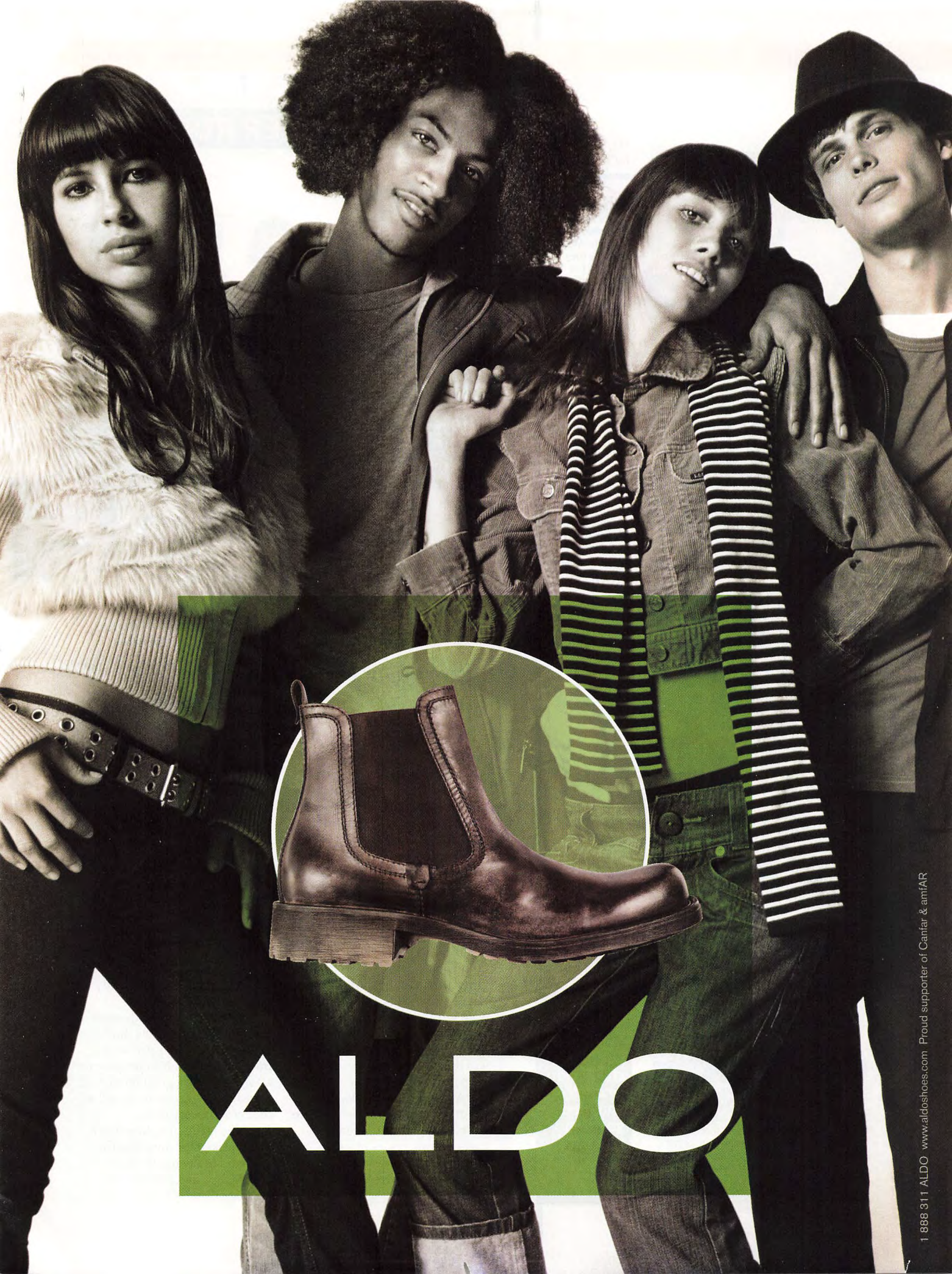
MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND
"An elaborate shrine to Freddie Mercury in my dressing room"

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY WHILE LISTENING
"Drinking, drugs and other forms of substance abuse"

POP SONGS WITH PERRY CAST AS A SUNNIER AVRIL.

Wardrobe styling by Cher Coulter/Luxe Mgmt; hair by Campbell McCauley/Solo Artist; makeup by Rob Talty/Luxe Mgmt; prop-styling by John Milhauser

DRESS FROM **SLOW** ON MELROSE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Kimora Lee Simmons "models" the evil-defying string, after her recent pot arrest.

SELL-OUT?

The celeb-endorsed Kabbalah string now on sale at Target.com

LATE THIS SUMMER, Target made available red-string Kabbalah bracelets — popularized by Britney Spears, Madonna and Kimora Lee Simmons — on its online store. Retailing at $26, the string, according to Target, was "sent to the ancient tomb of Rachel the Matriarch, and returned."

Kabbalists believe wearing the string protects against negative energy. Paris Hilton has said she went to the Kabbalah Center in L.A. to get hers when trying to "deal" with her split from Nick Carter.

Negativity banished here.

Some visitors to Target's site were less enthused. One poster accused Target of "selling a product developed without knowledge of Jewish beliefs." Another asked, "How dumb can you be to spend that much money on a string?"

The "spiritual" accessory was showcased in Target's Red Hot Shop, which "features the hottest and latest trends," a company spokesman said. *NOEL BODDIE*

CORRECTION

In the December edition of *Blender*, we published the following: "The Libertines, firing their management, have appointed Alan McGee . . . ." We accept that Ms. Banny Poostchi who used to manage the band was not fired or otherwise asked to stop managing the band. We apologize to her for the error.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

AVRIL LAVIGNE confirmed she ditched her writing-production team the Matrix because they received too much credit. "People said . . . I couldn't write," she grumbled. For her latest record, she enlisted songwriters CHANTAL KREVIAZUK, BEN MOODY, her guitar player EVAN TAUBENFELD and others.

Plans for the 'NSYNC greatest-hits have stalled over JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE's inability to find enough time to record new material with his former bandmates.

WORD!

"Britney, chill. Find yourself, and then go down the road."

BRANDY, WHOSE EX-HUSBAND CLAIMS THEIR MARRIAGE WAS FAKE, ON SPEARS'S ENGAGEMENT

LIFE AFTER ROCK

Norton — *not* Freddie Mercury — with Bob Mould and Grant Hart.

Greg Norton

OF HÜSKER DÜ

THEN!
BASSIST, 1979–1988

NOW!
CHEF/RESTAURANT OWNER, BAY CITY, WISCONSIN

★ "BEING IN HÜSKER DÜ was great fun. It was also a lot of work. Probably half the year we were on the road. Critics liked us because we were the 'thinking-man's punk rock.' This makes us sound really old, but in a way, we were trailblazers and helped set up [the early-'90s alternative rock] bands for larger commercial success. Even today, people reference Hüsker Dü in reviews.

"By 1988, a lot of things came to a head. If you take what [drummer] Grant [Hart] says, Grant quit the band. If you take what [guitarist] Bob [Mould] says, Bob removed himself from the contract. I think at the time I was the only one who wanted to keep the band going.

"After the band broke up about 13 years ago, I went back to work in the restaurant business. I was waiting tables in a fine-dining establishment and the chef, who started teaching me how to cook, said, 'Hey, you seem to have a bit of ability. Do you want to learn how to do this for a living?' I said, 'Sure, let's go for it.'

"Since then, I've worked under some very talented chefs. Last year, my wife and I opened our own restaurant called the Nortons. We describe the food as 'contemporary American with international influences.' Everything is brought in fresh and made to order. We do a lot with seafood, game and handmade pasta.

"I REFER TO MYSELF AS THE RESIDENT CORK DORK."

"We also have a really excellent wine program. We don't mark up the wine price very much above retail, so people can afford to drink a great bottle with a great meal. I refer to myself as the resident cork dork.

"This is the first time that I have worked for myself since the band broke up. It's very gratifying." *AS TOLD TO JON REGARDIE*

Top right: Claudia Thompson/ Retna Ltd.; courtesy of Greg Norton (inset); Center, bottom: Gary French (illustration).

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HELLO?

Lionel Richie drives, loses a wheel, crashes, and blames Simon Cowell . . . on TV!

1 On British TV show *Top Gear*, Richie competes in a contest in which celebs race cars around a track.

2 Determined to beat record-holder Simon Cowell of *American Idol*, he hurls his Suzuki around a bend.

3 Under the pressure, a wheel spins off and Richie crashes into the grassy median.

4 "Simon obviously had something to do with it," said Richie, who also blamed the rain, the wheels and the steering wheel for losing.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

Three California parole officers were fired for moonlighting as SNOOP DOGG's bodyguards. California state regulations forbid employment that is "incompatible or inconsistent" with an officer's regular duties.

DAVE NAVARRO announced that Jane's Addiction have once again parted. PERRY FARRELL responded with his own fond farewell, saying, "I no longer want to participate in such a maligned project. Music that was once relevant and graceful had become clumsy as a circus seal tooting his horns."

THE EDGE lost a disc featuring unmixed material from U2's forthcoming album during a photo shoot in southern France. Police are unsure whether the CD was stolen or simply mislaid by the guitarist.

WORD!

"I don't like to talk about politics. If you say you're a Democrat, that'll turn off Republicans, and that's half of your fan base."
LINDSAY LOHAN

Wayne Coyne, always watching his back for men in bunny suits.

IN THE STUDIO

"Kind of druggy"

That's how the Flaming Lips describe their "prog Dixieland" sound

★ "OH, YEAH, IT'S LIKE visiting a strip joint," Flaming Lips singer Wayne Coyne says of the recording process. "Only there are no strippers, and everybody has been there for so long that they've become skeletons. It is the most boring experience to witness."

Stationed at producer Dave Fridmann's studio in upstate New York, Coyne, 43, drummer Steven Drozd, 35, and bassist Michael Ivins, 41, are recording the follow-up to *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*, which sold more than 800,000 copies worldwide.

What does their 11th LP have in store? "Songs with a more organic feel, because we've moved away from robot sounds to sounds that are made by robots that come off organic," Coyne says with a chuckle. "It's getting into a space-age jazz element. Hopefully not too far out of the realm of what's listenable."

Coyne has tentatively titled the album *At War With the Mystics* — "Kind of druggy, isn't it?" — and says the sound will be "a sort of progressive Dixieland," without sacrificing their trademark "element of psychiatric injury." "Mr. Ambulance Driver" is one such track. "It's about a guy and a gal, and the gal is dying after a car accident and it's the moment they share as the ambulance approaches," Coyne explains.

Ultimately, he says, the important thing is to stay busy. "People give us a lot of money and freedom, but we don't just sit around and act like Velvet Revolver." CHUCK MINDENHALL

ALL ABOUT OUR ALBUM!

ARTIST
The Flaming Lips

STUDIO
Tarbox Road Studios, Cassadaga, New York

PRODUCER
Flaming Lips and Dave Fridmann

LAST ALBUM
Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots
(WARNER BROS., 2002)

NEW ALBUM
At War With the Mystics
(DUE OUT MID-2005)

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

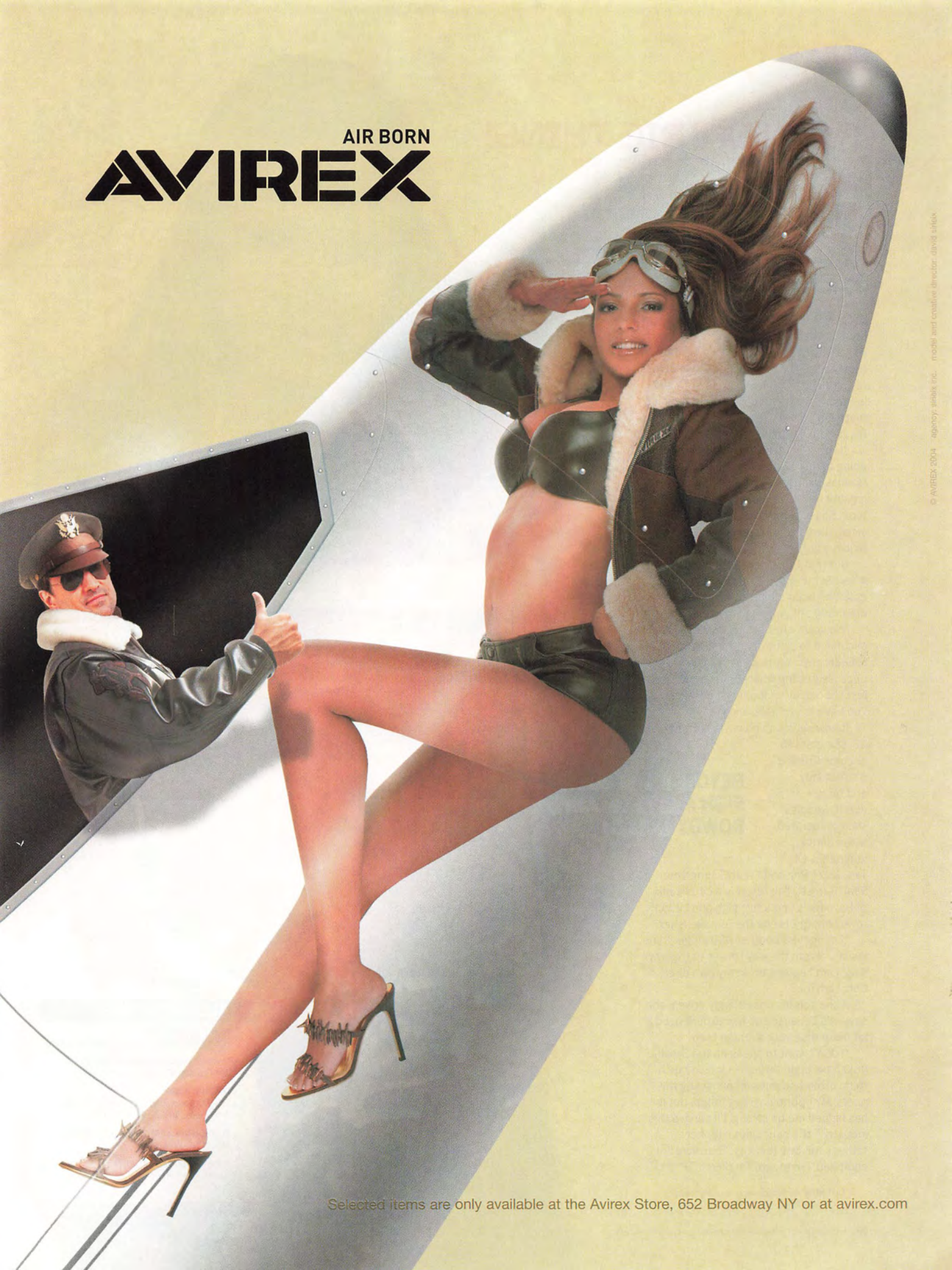
<< Metalheads **SYSTEM OF A DOWN** are holed up at Rick Rubin's L.A. house recording the follow-up to 2003's quint *Toxicity*, due December. . . .

BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE are working with Dave Newfeld to complete the follow-up to 2002's *You Forgot It In People*, due early 2005. . . .

Danish duo the **RAVEONETTES** are recording the follow-up to 2002's *Chain Gang of Love*, due in early 2005. . . .

Manchester's **DOVES** are in Fort Augustus, Scotland, finishing the follow-up to 2002's *The Last Broadcast*, due in 2005 . . .

Left: Splash News; Above: courtesy of Warner Bros. Near left: Mark Mann/Retna Ltd.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THE NEXT BIG THING!

Ciara

This 18-year-old singer traded everything — "friends, boys, parties" — for fame. *Awesome*!

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN WHITE

BEFORE SETTLING DOWN in Atlanta, Ciara Princess Harris spent her formative years with her mother, trailing her father from military base to military base across America. As a result, she made few lasting friendships as a child, but that didn't matter, really. Like Dad, Ciara was all focus and discipline.

"I was 14 and asked myself what I was going to do with my life," she says. "I loved dancing and I'd done some modeling, but I could also sing in a nice unique tone. So I decided to become a vocal artist. A week later, somebody invited me to join a girl band."

But that trio, Hear Say, didn't last. After six months of ego clashes, Ciara quit. She hadn't spent three years dreaming of fame to share it with others.

"No way!" she shrieks. "See, I've sacrificed to achieve my goal. I cut out friends, boys, parties, everything, because getting where I am now doesn't just happen by snapping your fingers. You have to struggle, and I did."

It now seems to be paying off. At just 18, she is set to become Crunk & B's first lady, and for her debut, *Goodies*, she collaborated with Atlanta luminaries Lil Jon, Jazze Pha and "Yeah!" songwriter Sean Garrett. The result is a catchy mix of Beyoncé's seductive sigh and Lil Jon's rowdy energy. Is she the female Usher?

BEYONCÉ'S SEDUCTIVE SIGH MEETS LIL JON'S ROWDY ENERGY.

"I'm not just another R&B singer," she insists. "From the way I dress to the way I sing, I am heading off in my own direction. I am me."

If she sounds unsettlingly driven, she says, it's because she has experienced a lot more than your average teen.

"I don't want to speak on that, really, but I have been through a lot, so much that I often find myself counseling my peers. My upbringing was tough, but it has helped me be strong. I'll survive this industry," she concludes with her father's military tenacity, "because I'm equipped, I'm tough, I'm driven." [BLENDER]

>>> **OUT NOW** GOODIES *SHO' NUFF/LaFACE/ZOMBA*

ALL ABOUT ME!

WON'T TOUR WITHOUT
Room-temperature water; baked chicken

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW BY ANY ARTIST
"No Problems" by Lil Scrappy

FAVORITE BOOK
The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For? By Rick Warren

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY WHILE LISTENING
Riding on a road trip

BUSH OR KERRY...AND WHY?
Kerry! *Fahrenheit 9/11* says it all.

JEANS BY **ROCK AND REPUBLIC**; SEQUINED TOP BY **BETSEY JOHNSON**; YELLOW BIKINI TOP BY **MISS SIXTY**; BANGLES, RINGS AND RHINESTONE BUTTERFLY BELT BY **NOIR**

Makeup by JJ using NARS for Jump; hair by Shereese Slate; styling by Rachel Johnson

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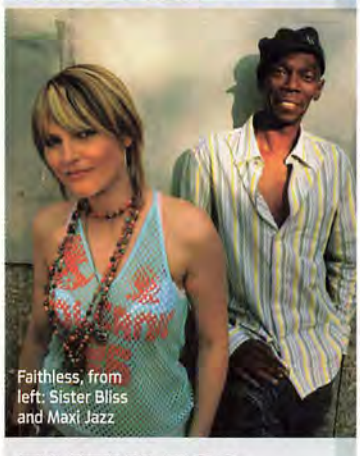
WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG?



Faithless, from left: Sister Bliss and Maxi Jazz

FAITHLESS

Mondo Kim's, 6 St. Mark's Place, New York City

BOARDS OF CANADA
TWOISM
SISTER BLISS: "It's electronica in its purest sense, with strange, other-worldly sounds, but put together in a way that makes you feel something."

VARIOUS ARTISTS
JOE GIBBS PRODUCTIONS
MAXI JAZZ: "Give anything with Soul Jazz records on it a try. They are great people, and they know the classics. This is all '70s reggae – the best you can get."

THE NEPTUNES
GREATEST REMIXES VOL. 1
SISTER BLISS: "Absolutely seminal in terms of production. They have a gift for giving fairly bland artists a totally different identity."

J-LIVE
ALWAYS WILL BE
MAXI JAZZ: "One of the best MCs out there. He's inventive musically and he uses intelligence to craft his words rather than being trendy. It's real hip-hop, rather than rap music."

→ FAITHLESS' NEW ALBUM, *NO ROOTS (ARISTA)*, IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

JAY-Z has asked five famous female friends to design individual S. Carter sneakers to auction off for his campaign promoting higher-education. The shoe designers are **BEYONCÉ**, **QUEEN LATIFAH**, **TYRA BANKS**, **JOY BRYANT** and **FERGIE** from the Black Eyed Peas.

ELTON JOHN has lashed out at the U.S. government's "bullying tactics" that he says stifle anti-war opinions in music. He also claimed many artists were too career-conscious to speak out.

PRINCE has declared he is avoiding overtly erotic subject matter in his new material to avoid corrupting his many young fans. "I just want to be the best human being I can be," he explained.

WORD!

"I wasn't really that drunk, I was just overserved."
GLENN CAMPBELL, EXPLAINING THE CAUSE OF HIS RECENT DUI ARREST

Typically nonpartisan, Springsteen is heading the largest political concert series in the history of rock.

Swing-Steen!

Pro-Kerry rock stars launch unprecedented tour in swing states

★ THE MOST AMBITIOUS concert series ever in support of a presidential candidate is being launched, led by Bruce Springsteen, Pearl Jam, Dave Matthews and R.E.M.

Aimed at persuading undecided voters to choose John Kerry on November 2, the six simultaneous Vote for Change tours encompass 33 shows in 28 cities in nine swing states — all during one week in October. The first day, October 1, includes six shows across Pennsylvania, from Springsteen and R.E.M. in Philadelphia to Pearl Jam in Reading, Dave Matthews at State College and the Dixie Chicks in Pittsburgh.

"The goal is very clear," Springsteen said. "We want to change administrations in November." Despite his socially conscious music, Springsteen has not taken a partisan stance until now.

"Hopefully we have built up a lot of credibility with our fans over the years. There comes a moment when you have to spend some of it. This is that moment."

Matthews was equally emphatic. "We have alienated ourselves from our most important allies," he said. "Four more years of [Bush] could truly be devastating to the world."

Though artists from all over the country are participating, the opposing side believes they represent the liberal, cultural elite. "I think it could backfire for [Kerry], who is going around the country saying he represents conservative values," says Steve Schmidt, Deputy Communications Director for the Bush campaign.

Babyface, John Mellencamp, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor, Death Cab for Cutie, Ben Harper, Jurassic 5, My Morning Jacket, Keb' Mo' and Bright Eyes round out the roster who will play cities in Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Michigan, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin and Florida. Proceeds, estimated at $44 million, will go to activist group MoveOn and independent voter organization America Coming Together. *NOEL BODDIE*

Far left: Photography by Tim Soter; makeup for Bliss provided by Bianca Alexander for M.A.C cosmetics. Above: Lalo Yasky/Wirelmage.com; left: Kevin Lamarque/Reuters/Corbis

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Richard Marx, now mullet-free

DO YOU ROCK?

RICHARD MARX

Does the Grammy-winning lite-rock legend . . . rock?

Ever trashed a hotel room?
One time, Robert Plant was set to check into the same room after I checked out, so I removed every light bulb and ordered up a bunch of stinky cheese and put it under the mattress.

Ever had a gambling fixation?
Not unless you count putting out another record.

Ever had a brush with the law?
Are mullets technically illegal?

Worst rock & roll injury?
I fell off the stage and bruised some ribs. The worst part was that the audience didn't realize I was gone.

Worst tour horror story?
Opening for Night Ranger.

Biggest celeb in your cellphone?
David Copperfield.

Ever get lucky on an airplane?
The Mile-High Club? Yup, I'm a member.

Biggest act of decadence?
Yesterday, I chartered a jet from Nashville to Chicago and back so to see my son's band play in a talent show. It was totally worth it.

Stupidest thing you've ever drunk?
Thirteen kamikazes in Singapore — in under 40 minutes.

Craziest rider clause?
One time we asked for 150 cubic feet of lumber and one table saw. *DAVE HILL*

VERDICT

SHOCKING BUT TRUE: RICHARD MARX ROCKS!

→ RICHARD MARX'S NEW ALBUM, *MY OWN BEST ENEMY (EMI/MANHATTAN)*, IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

The fortune-teller made famous in BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN's 1973 song "4th of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)" has returned to her New Jersey boardwalk shack after seven years. MADAME MARIE is again predicting the future for $5 to $35.

JACK WHITE has said the Von Bondies' JASON STOLLSTEIMER exaggerated the injuries he incurred during their scrap. Apparently, the photo of Stollsteimer's bloodied face was misleading. "Take a look at it again," White said. "It's a black eye once you wash the dried blood off."

OUTKAST'S ANDRÉ 3000 has been voted the world's sexiest vegetarian in an online poll by animal-rights group PETA. Previous winners include LAUREN BUSH.

WORD!

"The jury's in: The Beatles were a s*-hot band."**
PAUL McCARTNEY

Lindsay Lohan relaxes in Miami, and poses for *Blender*'s August issue (*inset*).

Unleashed!

Actress Lindsay Lohan to become a pop star. Take that, Duff!

★ TEEN IDOL Lindsay Lohan, just 18, has scored a multi-album deal with Casablanca Records. The newly relaunched label is now headed by Tommy Mottola, Mariah Carey's former mentor, who is also credited with launching Jennifer Lopez's singing career.

"[Lindsay Lohan] is the next big star," Mottola says. "She has the potential of all the big ones I've worked with."

The star of *Mean Girls*, who both starred in and sang on the soundtracks of *Freaky Friday* and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*, has already written a song of her own. Her first foray into songcraft is about going out and being chased by the paparazzi. *CHUCK MINDENHALL*

POP STAR MUST-HAVE

JOHN KERRY!

Perk-hungry stars eye the ultimate goodie bag: White House sleepovers and Air Force One rides!

MICHELLE BRANCH

JON BON JOVI

WYCLEF JEAN

MOBY

Clockwise from top left: C. Taylor Crothers/ Corbis Outline; Mavrix photo; Alphonse Telymonde; Mario Tama/Getty Images; Joyce Tenneson/Getty Images; Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com (2); Justin Sullivan/Getty/Newscom.com; Gary French (illustration)

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USEFUL TIPS FROM THE STARS!

HOW TO...

Kill Time On a Plane!

Santa Barbara punksters **Sugarcult** teach you how to keep yourself properly entertained with porn and booze during long international flights

Sugarcult, clockwise from top left: Airin Older, Kenny Livingston, Marko 72 and Tim Pagnotta

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE CHEHAK

1 MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR!

AIRIN OLDER, BASSIST: "Wait until the plane's rolling down the runway, then, when it's too late to switch seats, tell your neighbor a long, psychotic story, like how you just got out of prison. Establish body contact right away. Make sure you touch the other guy's arm on the armrest to leave your territorial mark."

2 THROW A PARTY!

MARKO 72, GUITARIST: "Booze is free, so stockpile as many little bottles as possible and then look for potential guests — young Swedish exchange students, for example — and invite them to the back of the plane. The best part? We noticed 'drinking ages' don't always apply over international waters!"

3 SEDUCE THE HELP!

TIM PAGNOTTA, SINGER: "Virgin and JAL have the hottest stewardesses — U.S. airlines always hire old bags — so we try to invite them to our shows. They're always jet-lagged, wired and looking to kill time in a city. It's perfect. Stand outside the bathroom to stretch your legs and ask, 'Fly this airline often?'"

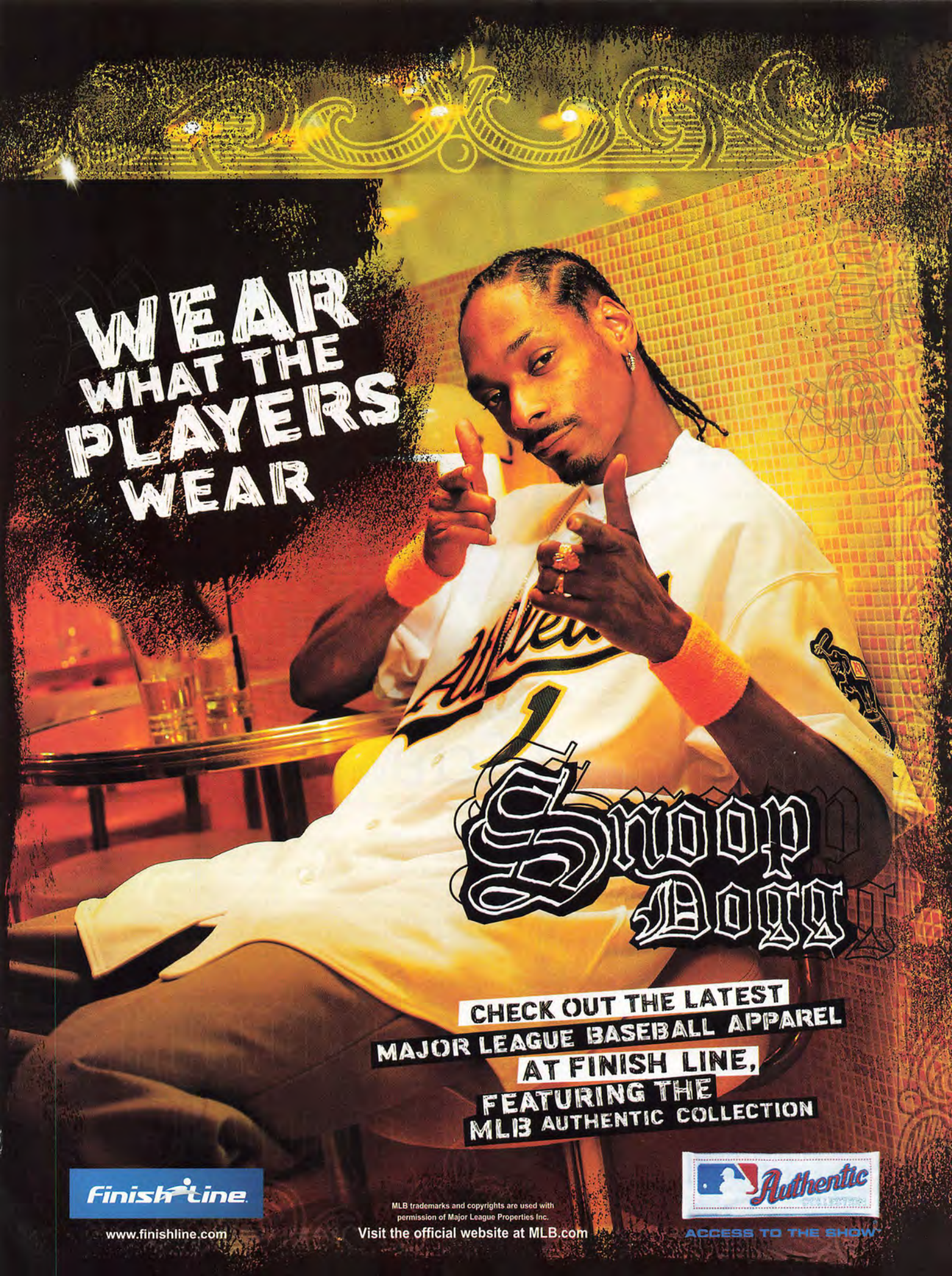
4 SEDUCE YOURSELF!

KENNY LIVINGSTON, DRUMMER: "You can always join the Mile High Club, but we suggest joining it solo — always a good way to kill four minutes. We've been lobbying for an adult section in the in-flight magazine, but the airline-safety card works, too. And the air-sickness bag makes a great sock substitute."

→ SUGARCULT'S NEW ALBUM, *PALM TREES AND POWER LINES* (MARTIANS), IS OUT NOW.

Grooming by Andie Markoe-Byrne; prop-styling by TNT Productions

 "As I get on the 707 ridin' high/I got tears under my eyes/You know you got to go through hell/Before you get to heaven"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Jacko, pre-wacko

NOW HEAR THIS!

Three music nabobs select songs the world really needs to hear

THURSTON MOORE
"LITTLE JOHNNY JEWEL"
TELEVISION
"This song is so minimal and spindly. Tom Verlaine wrote hip lyrics — bad-ass, New York City street poetry."

JC CHASEZ
"THERE SHE GOES"
BABYFACE
"An uptempo R&B track, produced by the Neptunes, was a big change for Babyface. People weren't open-minded enough to hear him try something different."

ANGIE STONE
"WITH A CHILD'S HEART"
MICHAEL JACKSON
"This ballad has a beautiful message: If we could all take life with a child's heart, nothing would get us down." *LAUREN HARRIS*

TELL US A JOKE!

WILLA FORD

"What's the useless piece of skin at the end of a penis called? A man!"

AS TOLD TO DICK GOZINYA

NEWS ROUNDUP!

JA RULE was charged with misdemeanor marijuana possession after being spotted swerving his vehicle between lanes without signaling. The charges were later dropped.

The recent **METALLICA** documentary, *Some Kind of Monster*, has reopened the band's age-old rivalry with Megadeth's **DAVE MUSTAINE**. The guitarist, who used to be part of the group, is calling the inclusion of a scene in which he and drummer **LARS ULRICH** discuss their personal issues a "final betrayal." Ulrich said: "We sent him the scene, and he asked us to not put that in. We . . . really respected his inquiry, and decided it was too integral to leave out."

WORD!

"We did it every way you could. She was an animal in bed. But it wasn't cheap."

BRITNEY SPEARS'S EX-HUSBAND JASON ALEXANDER ON THEIR NIGHT TOGETHER BEFORE EXCHANGING VOWS

Screw This!

In Norway, a couple fornicates onstage to save the rainforests. *Oof la!*

★ A RECENT NORWEGIAN music festival was enlivened by a couple having sex onstage to help save the rainforests. The surprise public display of affection took place at the Quart festival, in the city of Kristiansand, Norway, during a set by local metal band the Cumshots.

"How far are you willing to go [to save the rainforests]?" the environmentalists asked, and then proceeded to strip and fornicate as the band played "Go Forth and Fuck." The audience responded with enthusiastic cheers.

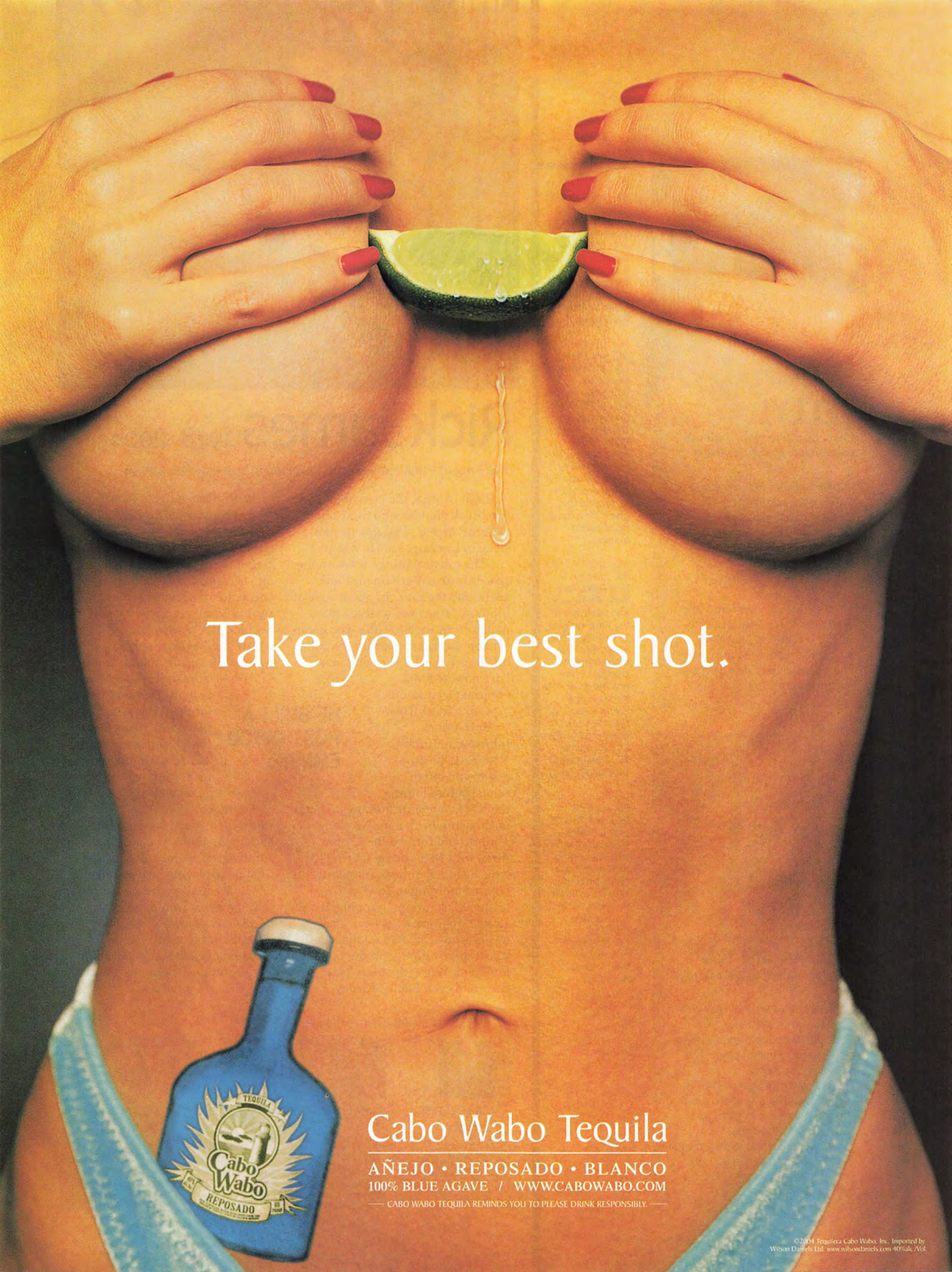
THE AUDIENCE RESPONDED TO THE SEX WITH CHEERS.

Open-air pair Leona Johansson, 21, and Tommy Hol Ellingsen, 28, are founders of the environmental group Fuck For Forest. They perform sex acts in public to draw attention to environmental issues. On their Web site, Fuckforforest.com, they identify themselves as "concerned youngsters" and have a photo of Johansson pleasuring herself in fishnet stockings with a thought bubble that reads, "Imagine a world where people were more giving."

Their stunts, however, have proved controversial; festival organizers ejected the loved-up political pair from the site upon completion. Public sex is illegal in Norway, and Johansson and Ellingsen were fined $1,550 each.

Head of Rainforest Foundation Norway Lars Løvold was also unimpressed. "I cannot see that this helps the work for the rainforest," he said. *STEVE LOWE*

Left, top to bottom: MichaelOchsarchives.com; Paul Hawthorne/Wireimage.com; Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com; Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com; Juan Rico/BigPicturesUSA.com/Newscom.com. Top, right: Pal R. Hansen/SCANPIX/Retna Ltd.; Heiko Junge/Scanpix/Retna Ltd. (inset). Bottom, center: Gary French (illustration)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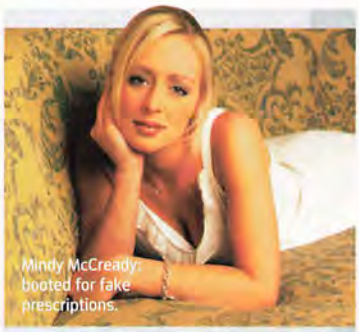
Butt not Beyoncé's own.

JELLY!

Beyoncé's *arse* makes special appearance at U.K. festivals

IN LATE AUGUST, festivalgoers in Britain were invited to bounce on Beyoncé's well-endowed rump. The Beyoncé Bling Bouncer, a "bouncy castle" shaped like the singer's behind, made its debut at the Carling Weekend events in Reading and Leeds.

"It was bouncy but firm," said one festivalgoer. "Just as I imagine it is in real life." Changing rooms, hot tubs called the Black Room Jacuzzis and pole dancers were also in the tent. *STEVE LOWE*


Mindy McCready: booted for fake prescriptions.

ARRESTED!

Country star on "Hillbilly Heroin"

COUNTRY SINGER Mindy McCready has been arrested in her Nashville home for allegedly using a fake prescription to obtain the painkiller OxyContin.

Local sheriffs booked the 28-year-old McCready – who topped the country charts in 1996 with "Guys Do It All the Time" – on charges of prescription drug fraud before releasing her on $10,000 bail. The star was unavailable for comment. *JOSH EELLS*

OBITS

SYREETA WRIGHT
58, July 5, in L.A., of cancer. Motown Records singer and ex-wife of Stevie Wonder. Teamed with Billy Preston for the 1980 Top 10 pop single "With You I'm Born Again."

ARTHUR KANE
55, July 13, in L.A., of complications from leukemia. Bassist of the '70s glam-punk pioneers the New York Dolls. "Killer" Kane and surviving Dolls David Johansen and Syl Sylvain recently re-formed the group for a handful of performances.

SIS CUNNINGHAM
95, June 27, in New Paltz, New York. Co-founder and publisher of the long-running folk-song journal *Broadside*. Cunningham wrote the Dust Bowl-era "How Can You Keep Moving (Unless You Migrate Too)," unearthed by Ry Cooder on his 1971 album *Into the Purple Valley*.

DARRELL RUSSELL
35, June 27, in St. Louis, in a car crash. Professional drag racer who spent time as tour manager for country musician Clay Walker. Russell's car lost control after crossing the finish line at Gateway International Raceway.

The "Super Freak" in 1979.

Rick James 1948–2004

The King of Punk Funk died in his sleep in Los Angeles, age 56

★ RICK JAMES, the lascivious funk-rock pioneer who lived a life of extreme excess, died quietly in his sleep in Los Angeles. He was 56.

The musical bridge between the spacey funk of Parliament-Funkadelic and the raunchy street style of hip-hop, James was a steady hitmaker from 1978 to 1984. His greatest pop success came with the 1981 hit "Super Freak," the song that later powered MC Hammer's 1990 hit "U Can't Touch This."

HE BUILT A POST-DISCO EMPIRE.

Born James Johnson in Buffalo, New York, he dropped in and out of school before joining the Navy. Scheduled for deployment in Vietnam, he fled in 1965 to Toronto and formed the Mynah Birds with Neil Young. During the '70s, he toiled in funk anonymity before emerging in 1978 as a leather-clad, groupie-groping, weed-advocating funk & roll star. Backed by his Stone City Band, James built a post-disco empire, producing hits for Teena Marie, the Mary Jane Girls and even Eddie Murphy.

With "Give it to Me Baby" and "Super Freak," off his multiplatinum *Street Songs* LP, James experienced crossover triumph. But by the end of the decade, he'd fallen deep into cocaine and decadence. He and a girlfriend were accused in 1991 of torturing a woman with a lit crack pipe. A year later, while out on bail, he was arrested for cocaine possession and assault on another woman. He spent two years in Folsom Prison for the crimes. As he told *Blender* in 2002, "I was a selfish and crazy drug addict who didn't give a fuck about my life or anyone else's."

Outrageous skits on TV's *Chappelle's Show* brought James back to the public eye, leading to an autobiography and talk of Dave Chappelle playing him in a movie.

"Rick could've dropped an album right now that would have gone platinum," says Kanye West, who recently worked with James. "Personality and songs sell albums — two things Rick James had a whole lot of." *NELSON GEORGE*

RICK JAMES HIS GREATEST CDs

COME GET IT!
★★★★
MOTOWN, 1978
Great debut, with disco-funk smash "You and I" and weed anthem "Mary Jane."

BUSTIN' OUT OF L SEVEN
★★★★
MOTOWN, 1979
Pre-stardom with deeper funk and emotive ballads.

STREET SONGS
★★★★★
MOTOWN, 1981
His best album and a black-rock landmark.

ANTHOLOGY
★★★★★
MOTOWN, 2002
With sweet funk and ballads, this is probably the starting point for casual fans.

Left, top to bottom: George Chin/Wireimage.com (inset); Mark Morrison/Retna Ltd. Top, right: RB/Redferns/Retna Ltd.

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TAKE A STAND - VOTE 2004

20 SONGS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 Art Brut
"Formed a Band" *ROUGH TRADE*
Southeast London's happily inept art-punks fire a Johnny Rotten-esque torpedo at rock pomposity.

2 Fiona Apple
"Extraordinary Machine" *EPIC*
A whimsical, oboe-and-bell-driven ode to the vagabond life. So odd, her label shelved it — but it leaked anyway.

3 Jimmy Eat World
"Pain" *INTERSCOPE*
Jim Adkins sighs and screams, detailing a character's devastating addiction to a girl and/or Vicodin.

4 Headset
"Back Before" *PLUG RESEARCH*
The Postal Service's Jimmy Tamborello trades synth-pop for rattling, abstract hip-hop.

5 Cock Lorge
"Cock in the Pussy" *TUBBYS*
Acoustic strums, breathy vocals — and lyrics about penetration? This NY trouba-dour gives John Mayer-style ballads a porny send-up.

6 The Used
"Take It Away" *REPRISE*
Utah's premier scream team return with a meltdown rant against people, caring and — oh, yeah — sunlight.

7 Elliott Smith
"A Distorted Reality Is Now a Necessity to Be Free" *ANTI-/EPITAPH*
Gorgeous, wisftul pop from the late mope. Each line is laced with sorrow and scorn.

8 Wolfman feat. Pete Doherty
"For Lovers" *ROUGH TRADE*
The Libertines' tragic cosinger gets unex-pectedly lovelorn, sounding more like Coldplay than the Clash.

9 Nelly
"Flap Ya Wings" *FO'REEL/UNIVERSAL*
Mr. Pimp Juice is back, coining a gross stripper dance and actually fitting "*gluteus maximus*" into a rhyme.

10 Chronic Future
"Time and Time Again" *INTERSCOPE*
Rap-rock slams against emo-punk on this Arizona foursome's breakout hit. The peacenik cartoon video is a must-see.

11 The Fiery Furnaces
"Single Again" *ROUGH TRADE*
Pianos and synths swirl as Eleanor Friedberger sings the domestic-abuse blues, eerily stripped of emotion.

Hilary Duff, seconds before being totally deafened.

The Used meet Mary-Kate Olsen.

OK, Nelly, keep the damn suit.

12 Jim Jones feat. Cam'ron and Bezel
"Certified Gangstas" *KOCH*
Cam and Jones jack a beeping, 1988 beat from Eazy-E for this scary street smash.

13 Hilary Duff
"Fly" *BUENA VISTA/HOLLYWOOD*
Urgent and theatrical, the Disney darling's new single sounds like Evanescence — but the inspirational lyrics are pure Duff.

14 Shawnna feat. Ludacris and Twista
"RPM" *DEF JAM SOUTH/UNIVERSAL*
On this stammering electro onslaught, Ludacris's tough homiette makes space-age crunk.

15 Moby & Public Enemy
"Make Love Fuck War" *V2*
Moby welds a dense Bomb Squad throw-back while Chuck D bellows rap's answer to *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

16 Vanessa Carlton
"White Houses" *INTERSCOPE*
This mini coming-of-age epic reminisces over spin-the-bottle sleepovers and nervous backseat trysts.

17 Theodore Unit feat. Ghostface &Trife
"Paychecks" *SURE SHOT*
With his new protégé in tow, Wu-Tang's finest MC is at his frantic best.

18 Afrika Bambaataa feat. Gary Numan & MC Chatterbox
"Metal" *TOMMY BOY*
The hip-hop beatmaster teams with '80s freakazoid Numan for this pounding electro cut.

19 J.O.Y.
"Sunplus" *DFA*
Chirpy-voiced Yoshimi P-We (of noise-rock psychos the Boredoms) squawks her way through this funky no-wave throwback.

20 The Electras
"Yellow Jacket" *ELECTRASROCKANDROLLBAND.COM*
John Kerry's high school band serves up rollicking, ramshackle garage rock — and he's on bass!

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SUBARU®
DRIVEN BY WHAT'S INSIDE™

Nelly

The hip-hop kingpin answers all your questions about pimps, sex with groupies and . . . bowling. Now what the hell is an apple-bottom?

BY DAVID KEEPS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

AN IMMACULATE BLACK 2004 Rolls-Royce Phantom sails into the parking lot of the Hollywood photo studio. A door opens and a spotless, white-on-white Nike Air Force 1 pokes out. The owner of the hot sneaker, popularized by his party-rap hit "Air Force Ones," is a man entirely at home with the concept of bling.

Noticing *Blender* gawking at his diamond earrings and jewel-encrusted wristwatch, Nelly grins. "I caught myself taking it easy today."

Life has been good to Nelly, the *Country Grammar* star whose problems with overheated rooms and too many clothes resulted in the biggest summer come-on of 2002. This September, the son of St. Louis is going all OutKast on us, dropping two new records on the same day.

"One is called *Sweat* and the other one is called *Suit*," the 25-year-old says. "*Sweat* is more up-tempo and *Suit* is more laidback."

So one disc is for getting down, the other is for getting off?

"I'm cool with that," Nelly says with a shrug, grabbing a sheet of readers' questions. But how cool will the "Hot In Herre" star be with our readers' prodding queries? *Blender* braces itself for some pimp outrage.

" 'Do I have a Band-Aid roadie?' " Nelly reads with a laugh. "Nah, man," he says. "I haven't worn a Band-Aid in two years."

Praise the Lord and pass the Pimp Juice!

What's the rap verse you're most proud of writing?
BLING2BLING, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

I got some off the new record in a song that's called "Die For You," where I say, "March the 2nd, 1999, that's when I got my little man Cornell III." That's the year my son was born. So the lyric goes, "I guess I felt how my father felt, and his father felt, and his father must have felt to see his self."

Can you drop a freestyle verse about what makes the perfect apple-bottom booty?
RZAGZA, PORTLAND, OREGON

"What I'm about to say, not everybody can relate/I'm explainin' slightly to you exactly what it takes/To have an apple-bottom and to have the perfect shape/You must have the curve, the tuck and the crease/And it might not hurt to use oil instead of grease!" You know what I'm saying? Small waist, big hips, nothing too extreme.

What do you think the age of consent should be for sexual relations?
ROYALTEE, JENKINTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

It should be 18. I think if you're old enough to go to jail as an adult, you should be old enough to make adult decisions.

Why do you think most rappers today are more concerned with money and bitches than, say, protesting the war?
WHATCHUTALKINABOUT, CLEVELAND, OHIO

> "I'M A BRENDA'S-GOT-A-BIG-OL'-BUTT KIND OF GUY."

Some people don't want politics in their music. Some people want their music to be uplifting so they can have fun and go dance. If you want to do the politics thing, be more involved personally, but you could talk about that and then tomorrow wake up and you're not selling records. So now you've protested the war . . . and you're broke! You're like, "Damn! I should've kept doing what I was doing and just stuck to doing my politics on another level."

Who do you think is going to end up in rehab or a mental health facility first: Britney or Christina?
SIRCRUNKALOT, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Probably Britney. Christina looks like she's doing it on purpose, and she looks like she has that under control. Like, this is her. And I think if something were to seriously happen to Britney, it might really →

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"The photographer's out of the hospital on Thursday."

"No, I'm not 'too old' to be playing Little League."

affect her mentally. I'm not saying that it *would*, because I know Britney and she's cool, but that could be a downer for her to come down from so high as the Barbie doll of pop.

Do you think R. Kelly is going to jail?
DR.DUKE, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

I hope he doesn't. I think he's a good person from what I know of him.

What's the weirdest place in the world?
NELLYFAN, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Amsterdam is weird, in a good way. It's a custom for you to smoke marijuana there. I'm not sayin' that I do that, but I know people who have. And the streets with the girls in the windows! A lot of people in my camp did that when we were on tour out there. Not me, though.

Can you say something to me in a foreign language?
ILOVEDIDDY, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Si.

What's the oddest job you've ever had?
BADBOY4LYFE, ARCADIA, CALIFORNIA

I used to work at UPS. I don't know if that's odd, though.

When was the last time you were in a physical fight, and who won?
RUCRAZY, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

It's been a while. I think it was when I was first getting started. We were on a promotional tour and we were at this one club in North Carolina and these guys got to trippin', and we were just all, you know . . . . I think once you get older, it's not about who wins, it's about fighting and living to fight another day. Once you're older, a fight is just a fight. Nowadays, as long as nobody dies — shit . . . you won.

Nelly — Great rapper, lousy shadow puppeteer.

Did you cry during the last episode of *Friends*?
MUSICLVR, ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA

No. I didn't see that one.

When was the last time you cried?
RAPGAMER, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

When I found out my sister had leukemia. That's probably the last time a tear rolled down my eye, because I'm not a real big crier. I probably only cried five or six times in my life and I think four of those was by my daddy kicking my ass.

Snake alive!

I know your sister needed a bone-marrow transplant. How could I go about donating mine?
MARRYMENELLY, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

If you were to come out to a drive some day, what you do is, you fill out maybe a sheet or so of information. And then they would take a little blood from you. If you are a match, they'll call you back within a few days. You come in, you give bone marrow and you're out the same day.

How would you spend the day if you could be the invisible man?
CLARK KENT, OSSING, NEW YORK

Probably in Bill Gates's accounting office, just learning how to sign his name!

Have you ever been arrested?
LOTTALUV4HOTTIES, CLEVELAND, OHIO

Yeah. It's kind of hard not to be. I used to get into a lot of fights. I did a lot of things back in the day, and, well, everybody's been arrested for traffic shit — tickets and shit just building up. I've never been to a penitentiary or nothing. Mostly it's been overnight things or until you can find this damn lawyer. Where the fuck is he at?

What was the worst trouble you got into when you were a kid?
FUNKMEISTER, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

I was about about six or seven and me and a friend were building these tents in his yard and we fell asleep in the tent. By the time we woke up, the sun was coming up and man, I was walking home, and my house is the only one on the block with the light on and you could just feel it: Mom's waiting like a motherfucker.

What are you most afraid of?
RUREADY4ME, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

I'm just scared of being scared. And I'm not too fond of snakes.

Have you ever visited the St. Lunatics' City Spud, aka Lavell Webb, in prison?
MUSCLES, DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Yeah, I visited him. He doesn't really need anything. We always ask him what he needs, does he need anything? →

Clockwise from top left: Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com; Stephen Stickler/Corbis Outline; Age Fotostock (snake); Justin Stephens

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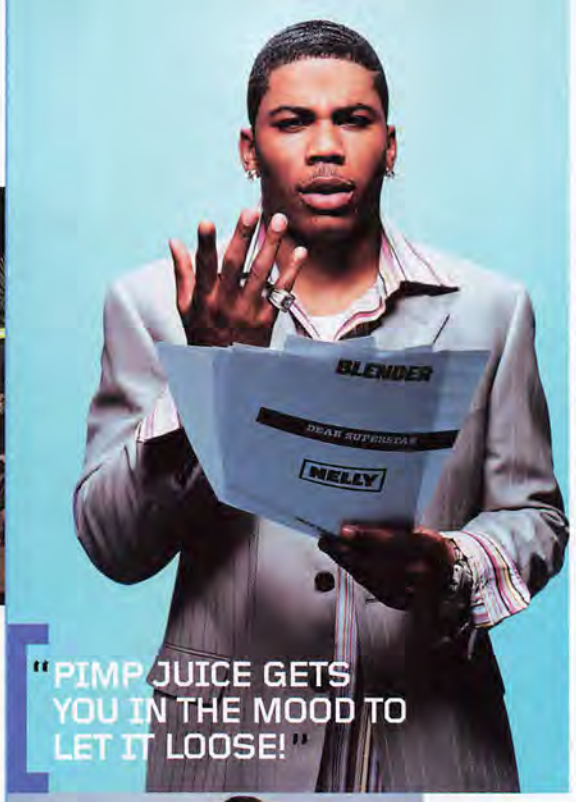
Nelly (second from right) and members of the St. Lunatics.



"PIMP JUICE GETS YOU IN THE MOOD TO LET IT LOOSE!"

If you were stuck on a deserted island, what three things would you bring?
DRZEUS, ATLANTA BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA

PlayStation with all the sports games: all the EA Sports, John Madden, MVP Baseball, NBA Live. Food — duh! And a lifetime's supply of matches.

Are you a put-'em-on-the-glass kind of guy, or a Brenda's-got-a-big-ol'-butt kind of guy?
ULTRADORK, DENVER, COLORADO

Brenda's-got-a-big-ol'-butt kind of guy.

Trina recently rapped that you have a big ol' dick. Care to comment?
SWINGERZ, SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA

It beats her saying the alternative! I actually didn't even hear the song until a couple of weeks ago, but I had a lot of people calling me and telling me about that. I love the song and I love Trina, let me say that.

What, scientifically speaking, sets Pimp Juice apart from other energy drinks?
POPSTARZ, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

It's the juice, man, you know what I'm sayin'? Pimp Juice is the original energy drink of artists. It gets you in the mood to let it loose! [*Sings*] "You let it loose, with Pimp Juice!"

Who do you think you are going to vote for in this election?
WOLFMAN, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

I really like John Kerry. You could just put the Bush ballot on the side, close your eyes and pick anyone else.

What do women really want from men?
MZTHING, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Everything that we can't give 'em. [*Laughs*] Nah, if you listen to some women, they'll tell you that they just want a little understanding, a little time and for guys to pay attention to them and stuff like that. It's probably what they've been asking for since the beginning of time. Come eat this damn apple!

Trina's other job? Mussel farmer!

Do you actually know any real pimps?
LUCKY STAR, ASBURY PARK, NEW JERSEY

I've met a few guys who actually [practice] the original origin of the word "pimp," soliciting young ladies for prostitution, something like that. I let them Pimpologists be Pimp-o-Mackerel. I haven't asked them, but one thing about being a pimp is they always willing to spit game. You have to be a great talker to be a pimp.

Exactly how hot does it have to be for you to take off all your clothes?
LADYBUG4, AVON LAKE, OHIO

Depends: If she's takin' hers off, not long! It's more of a timing thing than temperature, per se. A lady knows the first time she meets you if she's going to partake in relations. Women know when they first meet you if they really gonna let you knock the boots. Like my man Chris Rock said, "Women are just hoping you just don't say nothing to fuck it up!"

Do you ever feel sad and lonely after a quickie with a groupie?
BIGBALLER, ATHENS, WEST VIRGINIA

Nah, you never really feel sad and lonely. You are a grown man and you have to just understand these things in a logical way. It's an understanding between two consenting adults. There are no hard feelings, and you have to try to not get your feelings involved. So we are going to do it safely, of course, and make sure everybody is protected and nobody is going into it expecting anything more than what it is.

What is your position on gay marriage?
BENTLEEZ, SOUTH BEACH, MIAMI

I have to say that I'm more of a traditional type of guy. I think a man and a woman are the foundations of a family, but we live in a country where it's said to be free, so you have to allow people to make their own decisions for themselves. I think that if [gay people] are going to [get legally married], then it should involve every aspect of a traditional marriage: Both people should be held accountable for everything that a man and a woman would be held accountable for if things weren't to go as planned. If you have the same rights, then you should have the same responsibilities

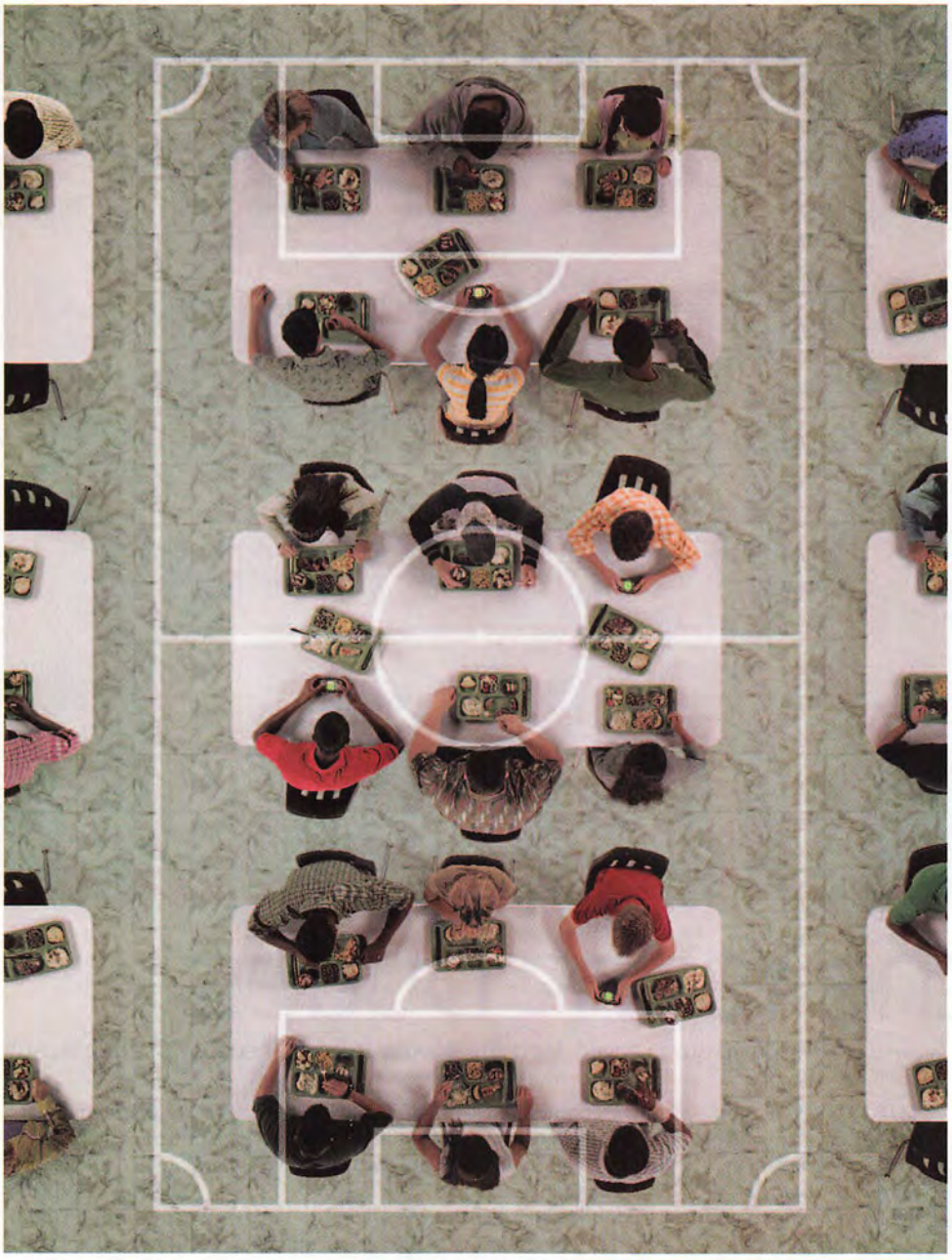
Do you have any strange hobbies that people would be really surprised to find out about?
PITBULLLVR, CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OHIO

Bowling. My high score is 257. I got shoes, balls the whole thing. One is a St. Louis Quantum ball; another one is more of a maroon blue, and another one is black and red and white. I try to bowl at least a few times a month.

You're a big chess player. Can you give me a tip to better my game?
RAPPRINCESS, AUBURN, ALABAMA

The best tip is to learn how to play the game first. It's kind of like what one of my uncles used to tell me when I thought I could play first. He said, "Do you know how to play chess, or do you just know how the pieces move?" That's the difference. You might know how the pieces move, but that don't mean you really know how to play chess. It's about having a plan. That's why they say that life is a game of chess: because you have to plan! You always have to plan three or four moves in advance. [BLENDER]

Clockwise from top left: Sara DeBoer/Retna Ltd.; Justin Stephens; Haitem; Alphonse Telymonde



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EA SPORTS NOKIA

Mott the Hoople, from left: Pete Overend Watts, Mick Ralphs, Dale Griffin, Ian Hunter and Verden Allen

All the Young Dudes

David Bowie saved **Mott the Hoople** from extinction with this glam-rock anthem

THE STORY OF Mott the Hoople's greatest success starts on March 26, 1972, with the band breaking up.

"We had been signed to Island Records since 1969," lead singer Ian Hunter recalls. "And in 1972, we found ourselves playing in a gas tank [station] in Switzerland that had been converted into a club. I decided that if this was rock and roll, they could keep it."

After a massive argument, the band split up and returned to London, where they all planned to go their separate ways. First to strike out on his own was Mott the Hoople bassist Pete Overend Watts. Upon hearing that David Bowie was forming a new backing band, Watts called him to ask for an audition, only to find Bowie horrified by the idea of Mott the Hoople splitting up. As Watts remembers it, Bowie countered with an offer, saying, "Look, I've got a song I've half-written. Let me ring you back in an hour or two. I have to speak to my manager."

Mott keyboardist Verden Allen says he cherishes the memory of their subsequent meeting with Bowie at his management office on London's New Bond Street. "He sat on the floor with an acoustic guitar and played 'All the Young Dudes' for us," Allen recalls. "All he had was one verse and the chorus, but you could tell right away it was a fantastic song."

Although they had made the decision to split, Mott were obliged to complete what they imagined would be their final tour, the Rock & Roll Circus. On the last day of that tour, Allen says, "Bowie sent us a telegram to say the song was finished and he had booked a studio."

> "THE SONG SPOKE FOR A RISING GENERATION."

The only catch was that the band's relationship with Island Records had reached an all-time low. "We'd told the owner, Chris Blackwell, that we were going to split up, and he threatened that we'd never work again," Allen says.

So while Bowie's manager, Tony DeFries, schemed to get Mott out of their Island deal, the band entered London's Olympic Studios in mid-May for a recording session held in complete secrecy in the dead of night.

There was no time to rehearse or plan anything. Mott's drummer, Dale Griffin, explains, "To record it, [Bowie] played it to us, and we played it back to him." The basic track was laid down in just two hours, but in that first brief session, Mott guitarist Mick Ralphs came up with the vibrant opening lick that would become ➔

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David Bowie, 1973: "Which button's the Dobly?"

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG
"All the Young Dudes"

ARTIST
Mott the Hoople

LABEL
Columbia

PERFORMERS
Ian Hunter *guitar/vocals*
Mick Ralphs *lead guitar*
Verden Allen *keyboards*
Pete Overend Watts *bass*
Dale Griffin *drums*
David Bowie *guitar, backing vocals, handclaps*

PRODUCER
David Bowie

RELEASED
October 1972

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
37

WEEKS ON CHART
11

one of the glam-rock anthem's most distinctive features.

Returning to the studio the following night, Hunter recalls, Bowie seemed depressed. "He felt the song was flagging toward the end — that nothing was happening," Hunter says. "He was at the point of deciding not to use it as a single when I remembered an encounter I'd had with a heckler during a recent gig at the Rainbow [in London]. He was annoying me, and I ended up pouring beer all over him." Hunter recreated the incident for them, and introduced it into the song as the improvised rap that begins, "Hey, you down there, you with the glasses."

Hunter's twist pumped the necessary energy into the closing moments of the song — *and* restored Bowie's faith. But there still was another hoop for the band to jump through. "DeFries got us out of our Island contract and moved us to Columbia Records," Hunter says, "but when their lawyers heard the line 'Stealing clothes from Marks and Sparks,' they freaked."

Marks & Sparks is the popular nickname for the British chain Marks & Spencer, and Columbia's lawyers realized the U.K.'s only national pop station, BBC Radio 1, would refuse to play any song that could be seen as an advertisement. "By then I was in New York," Hunter says, "so I had to fly back to London overnight, re-sing 'Marks and Sparks' as 'unlocked cars' and then fly straight back to America again."

Entering the U.K. singles chart in August 1972, "All the Young Dudes" soared all the way up to number 3, reinvigorating Mott and initiating a string of hits. In America, where the song was released in October 1972, it peaked at a less-impressive number 37, but thanks to such androgyny-themed lyrics as "Now Lucy looks sweet 'cause he dresses like a queen," it was quickly embraced as an anthem of the gay counterculture. "We had problems getting airplay in America because of the gay connotations," Hunter says. "It got played on the coasts, but hardly at all in the South and the Bible Belt."

Even after the song rocketed them to international stardom, Hunter didn't know Bowie had intended to use the song on his futuristic concept album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars*. Years passed before Bowie revealed that the line "All the young dudes carry the news" refers to a point in the story when, with no electricity left in the world, Ziggy uses songs to spread the news.

"'All the Young Dudes' is a song about this news," Bowie explained. "It's not a hymn to the youth, as people thought. It is completely the opposite."

However devotees chose to understand it, the song provided inspiration for several generations of rockers. Covered by artists as diverse as the Damned, Travis and Jill Sobule, its celebrity admirers also include Queen's Brian May and Def Leppard's Joe Elliott, who has said he wants the song played at his funeral.

Hunter says one of his proudest moments was when he teamed with Bowie to sing the song at the Freddie Mercury Tribute at Wembley Stadium on April 20, 1992. "When we played it at the Queen tribute," Hunter says, "it was obvious 'All the Young Dudes' had spoken for a rising generation — and it's still a bloody great song." *JOHNNY BLACK*

IAN HUNTER
Shock-headed pioneer glam singer subsequently an acclaimed producer and solo artist.

WHO'S WHO

DAVID BOWIE
The 57-year-old rock chameleon recently underwent emergency heart surgery.

VERDEN ALLEN
Keyboardist now living in rural England and still releasing solo albums.

PETE OVEREND WATTS
The Hoople's bassist, he re-formed the band as Mott when Hunter left.

Above left: Mick Rock; Middle: Mr. Snuggles; Bottom from left: David Warner Ellis/ Redferns/ Retna Ltd.; LFI; Harry Goodwin/Rex USA (2)

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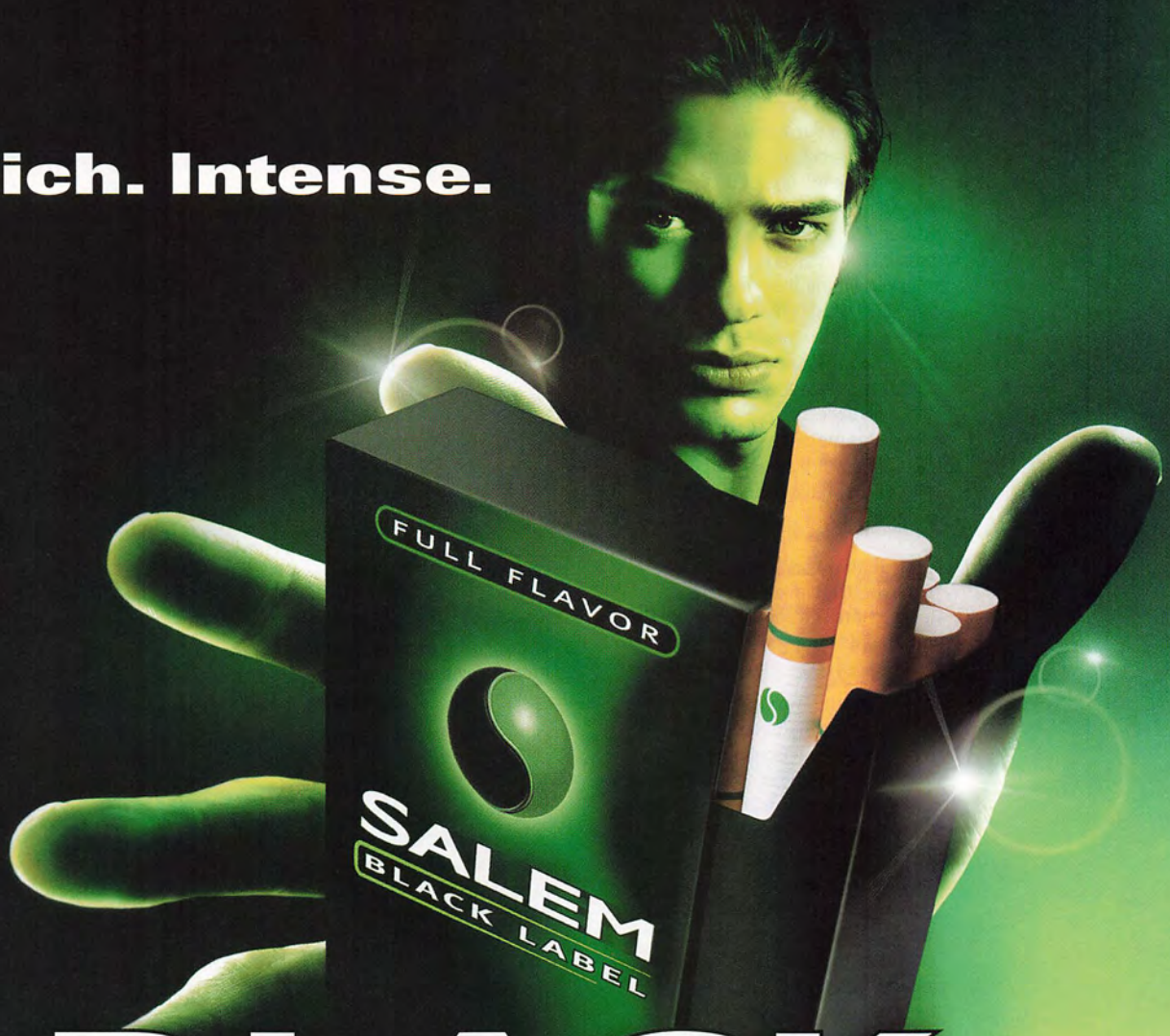

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SOLVING YOUR POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

Madonna: "How long till dinner?"

Did Madonna really write "Hanky Panky" after finding out that Warren Beatty was into spanking?

KASEY BRUNO, PATTERSON, NEW JERSEY

Apparently so. According to reports, Madonna's then-boyfriend Beatty, two decades her senior, would even deliver a sharp smack to her backside on set during the filming of *Dick Tracy* if he ever considered her acting to be below par (presumably resulting in quite a lot of smacks). During their late-'80s courtship, which greatly upset her former husband Sean Penn, who introduced the pair, and ended after a short-lived quasi-engagement, Madonna once said: "[Beatty is] so perfect for me. He has no restrictions. He says to me, 'If you misbehave, I'll just have to spank you.' I love that."

Is it true that Led Zeppelin wrote "Stairway to Heaven" because George Harrison said they couldn't write ballads?

ED VOGEL, FREMONT, CALIFORNIA

This story often wrongly mentions "Stairway," but Harrison's comment to drummer John Bonham that Zeppelin should do more ballads did in fact inspire "The Rain Song." The former Beatle was a huge Zep fan and sometimes partied with the band in early-'70s Los Angeles (he tossed John Bonham's 25th-birthday cake into a hotel pool).

In tribute to his well-meaning tip, guitarist Jimmy Page decided to start the slow seven-minute centerpiece of 1973's *Houses of the Holy* with the first two chords of Harrison's Beatles masterpiece "Something."

A related story: Once, hearing that Harrison was waiting for them, Led Zeppelin dressed up in drag to greet him. Upon going downstairs, they found him with Stevie Wonder, who, while everyone else doubled over laughing, was left asking, "What's so funny?" Realizing their act looked like a joke at the blind singer's expense, the foursome retreated in quiet embarrassment.

Is it true that someone made a snuff film to go along with Nine Inch Nails' 1992 *Broken* EP?

JASON LAYNE, CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Thankfully, no. The notorious *Broken* movie contained a fake snuff section directed under Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor's guidance by Peter Christopherson, a member of industrial-music icons Coil and Throbbing Gristle, who somehow obtained the nickname "Sleazy."

The 30-minute film — portraying a U.S. Marine being kidnapped and forced to watch videos while being tortured, mutilated and, finally, killed — was, not surprisingly, considered too violent for release. Apart from the section entitled "Happiness In Slavery" (which shows performance artist Bob Flanagan strapping himself into a machine that rapes and kills him), it has been available only as a bootleg and, inevitably, over the Internet. According to Reznor, "[*Broken*] makes 'Happiness In Slavery' look like a Disney movie."

By the way, rumors that the F.B.I. believed the footage was genuine and launched an investigation into it are just plain untrue. *That* story concerns Nine Inch Nails' debut video, "Down In It," which also contained scarily believable images, this time of a decomposing corpse that strikingly resembles Reznor. And the F.B.I. *did* launch an investigation on that one. But anyway, moving on . . . . [BLENDER]

Frances Bean, Courtney and Kurt in unsurprisingly happier times

Amos: "Button-up, Cobain!"

Is the Tori Amos song "Professional Widow" really about Courtney Love? Please say it is.

CARLA LARSON, VIA E-MAIL

OK, then: It is. The lyrics of the 1996 song — which achieved an illustrious afterlife thanks to DJ Armand Van Helden's famed remix — appear to concern a publicity-crazed woman who preys on her famous husband, keeping him sweet with heroin ("China white/Brown may be sweeter/She will supply") as her own power increases. So what makes you think it's about Love?

Diplomatic Tori has never categorically admitted Love is the inspiration for the unflattering number, but in '98, she said, "Let's put it this way — Courtney and I have never spoken. We've never spoken about it, and we've never spoken, and I think it's best kept that way. We have mutual friends. I don't want to put them in a bad position." So, one more time: Yes, it *is* about Courtney Love.

YOUR QUESTIONS

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Clockwise from top left: CKR/LFI; Kevin Mazur/LFI; Dennis Kleiman/Retna Ltd.; Frank Forcino/UFF-LFI

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THUG IN LOVE

The consummate hip-hop street poet has changed. Forget battles with Jay-Z, Tek-9s and blunts. Instead, say hello to painting, walks in the park and love. "I know this is right," says the all-new **Nas.**

BY CHRIS NORRIS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAKE CHESSUM

IF YOU WANT to know a thug's heart, just look under his sleeve. In Nas's case, everything is right there on his arms. On the right one: an exquisite ink rendering of his life's love, the groovy R&B singer Kelis. She's topless, her prodigious milkshakes frozen in time, her cool gaze and lush Afro-ringlets suggesting one of the sculpted goddesses on a late-'60s Miles Davis album. On his left arm: his beloved mother, Ann Jones, whom he lost to cancer in 2002.

"She's watching over me," Nas explains, pointing out the fluffy clouds and rays of light bordering his mother's face. She sure is. She's also carrying a machine gun.

Nas got both tattoos about a year ago, when he was facing the kind of challenges you do when you approach the Big 3-0: worries about maturity and commitment, and a superstar rival bragging that he had boned your ex and come in your Bentley. It was a stressful time.

"Nah, it wasn't that bad. Those were not real battles," Nas says of his now-legendary conflict with Jay-Z. Still, that beef *was* super ugly. So much so, in fact, that Jay-Z released a song *called* "Supa Ugly," in which Jigga was distinctly ungentlemanly about Nas's baby-mama, whom both have dated ("You was kissin' my dick when you was kissin' that bitch," etc.). But Nas more than held his own, casting felicitous aspersions on Jay-Z's manhood with lines like "H-to-the-Omo" and references to "dick-sucking lips." He even won a listener call-in battle with Jay on New York powerhouse rap radio station Hot 97.

"Battles are very serious," Nas reflects later. "At the time, it was everything."

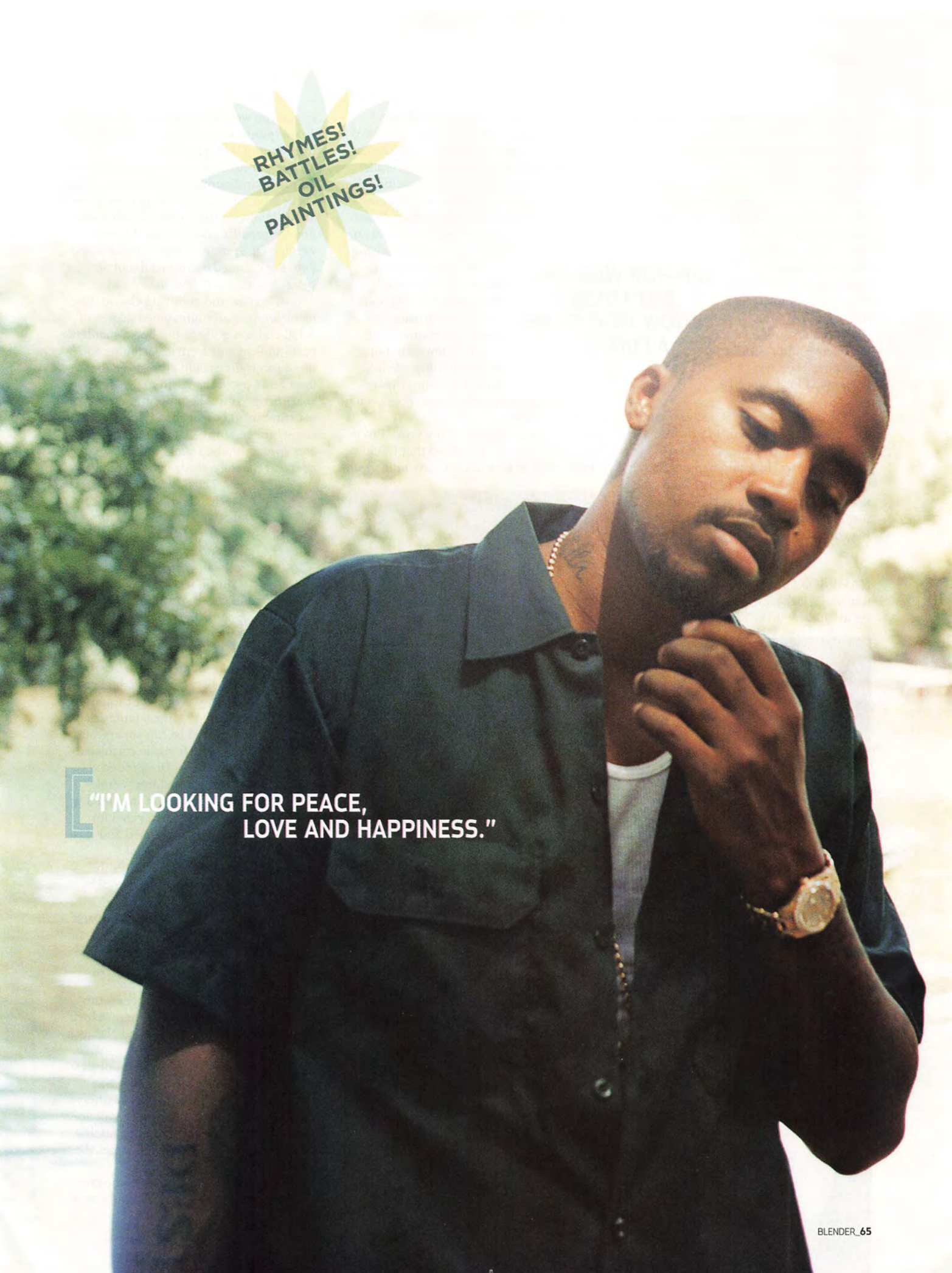
That was another life, though, says Nasir Jones, 30, kicking back on a glorious July day in New York's Central Park.

"I don't even know who that guy is now," he says.

And he's right: It's hard to even think about battles today in the park, Nas's favorite place in New York City. Clouds drift across the brilliant sky, rowboats coast along the green pond, and one of the most respected MCs in hip-hop history, now releasing his seventh album, *Streets Disciple*, seems light years away from any street warfare and drama.

"I wake up and I say, 'Man, I don't even deserve to be me,' " he says softly, fingering some amber-tinted shades. "It's just very, very, very amazing."

Our quietly blissed-out thug laureate is wearing a dark-green Dickies shirt, Paper Denim and Cloth jeans and forest-green Adidas — an understated look →


RHYMES!
BATTLES!
OIL
PAINTINGS!
"I'M LOOKING FOR PEACE,
LOVE AND HAPPINESS."

set off by a diamond-studded gold chain and cross. The look is perfectly hip-hop, but he's none too worried about convincing you of it. In fact, Nas seems remarkably unconcerned about meeting the expectations of a street-raised, hardcore MC. While every other rapper shouts out his baby-mama and his latest litter of pitbulls, Nas refers to his "fiancée" and will gladly tell you about his recent interest in painting.

"I'm looking for peace, love and happiness now," he says. "I been ready for it since I was 18."

He proposed to Kelis last year, and the date is creeping up. "I know I'm a great guy, and if it looks like there's not gonna be peace, love and happiness, I can't commit. But this here, I know this is right. Wherever I'm at is her home. I mean, it's interesting. It's challenging. It's some soul-searching. But I'm ready."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

NASIR JONES, SON of Ann Jones and renowned jazz-trumpeter Olu Dara, grew up in Queens, New York's Queensbridge housing projects — then a violence-plagued, bitter little universe. "The block, the benches, the basketball court — that was pretty much the world," he recalls. Nas grew up drawing comics, writing scripts and telling stories — all interests he attributes to his yarn-spinning father.

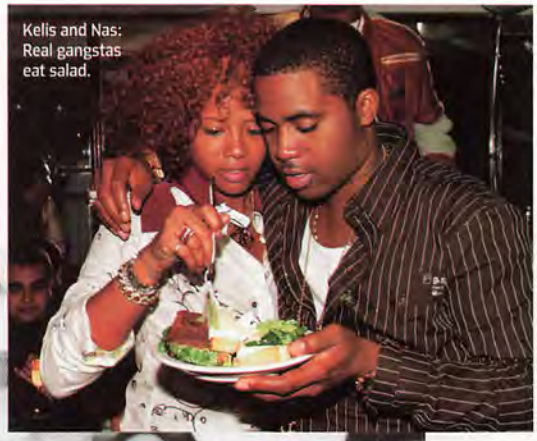
"HIP-HOP WAS FUN, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO BE A *FUN* MC."

But by the time he was 9, hip-hop was in full swing.

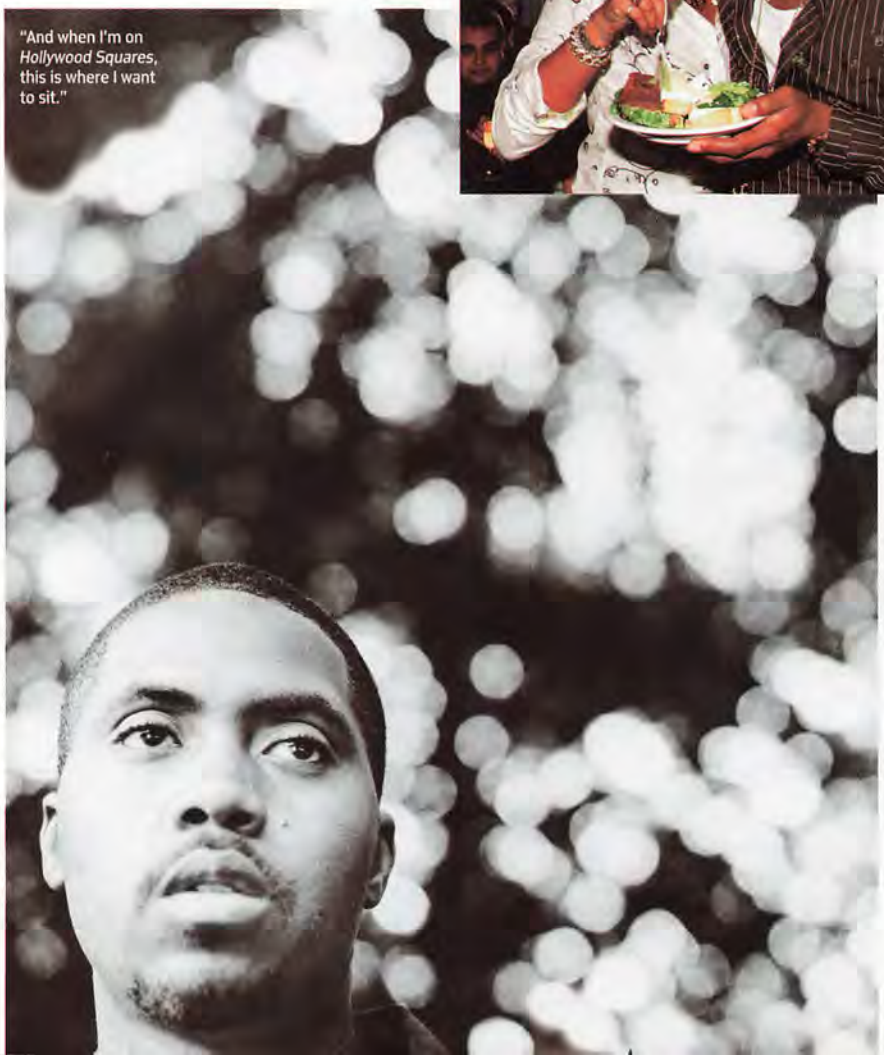
"It was all starting," Nas says. "Park jams, everybody hanging out. There were parties and music going on all night."

He dropped out of school in 8th grade and started penning rhymes, emulating the harder street rappers, such as Kool G Rap.

"Hip-hop was fun," Nas says. "But it was the '80s, and I realized that I didn't know how to be a *fun* MC. My little brother and me were out there — I was buying Tek-9 [guns] at a young age. I didn't feel like rapping 'Yes, yes, y'all.' "



Kelis and Nas: Real gangstas eat salad.



"And when I'm on *Hollywood Squares*, this is where I want to sit."

He put his first lyrics to wax at age 17 on the Main Source song "Live at the Barbecue," his verses electrifying enough to attract attention from pretty much every notable producer of the time. Heavyweights DJ Premier, Large Professor and Pete Rock signed on for his debut and, in 1994, Nas released *Illmatic*.

An instant and enduring classic, *Illmatic* brought an unimagined degree of detail and inner life to hip-hop's standard beats-and-rhymes format. Listening to those songs, one could almost see the then 20-year-old rapper in his Queens apartment, "sittin' bent up in the stairway . . . laughin' at baseheads, tryin' to sell some broken amps." It was gritty, lyrical and vivid, a hip-hop version of New York poet Jim Carroll's seedy coming-of-age book, *The Basketball Diaries*.

"He could just put those words together to make the most thuggish, ruggish street guy appreciate poetry," Large Professor marvels.

But it isn't easy being that odd paradox: an introspective rapper. After *Illmatic*, Nas went through a dizzying series of career highs and lows, trying to find the right balance between serious artist and product-moving pop star. He got caught up in bloated Mafioso fantasies with would-be rap-supergroup the Firm. He made calculated pop crossovers with Dr. Dre-produced radio jams like "If I Ruled the World." The nadir is probably best represented by the image of Nas, in the '99 video for "Hate Me Now," being whipped and carrying a cross, as rap's symbol of unchained rap commercialism, Puffy Combs, presides over his crucifixion by player-haters.

But around 2001, Nas found himself again — in battle with Jay-Z. Jay, in a convincing claim for rap's King of New York throne, released the Nas-dissing song "The Takeover." In late 2001, Nas responded with *Stillmatic*'s opener, the battle-rhyme tour-de-force "Ether," which targeted Jay-Z and re-established Nas as a potent artistic and commercial presence.

Tracy Cloherty, vice president of programming at Hot 97, has known Nas throughout his entire career. "I've always thought he was incredible, and I still do," she says. "What he's rhyming about, his flow, his whole style — he embodies the sound of New York."

Nas followed *Stillmatic* with the critically acclaimed *God's Son*, an album in →

Top to bottom: Johnny Nuñez/Wireimage.com; Jake Chessum

saturday, october 16

Beastie Boys

Green Day, The Pixies

Paul Van Dyk, The Killers, Gomez

Cypress Hill, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club

Polyphonic Spree, Sonic Youth, Snow Patrol

New Found Glory, Phantom Planet, Metric

The Thrills, KillRadio, Gording, Mix Master Mike

sunday, october 17

Kid Rock

Velvet Revolver

Alter Bridge, De La Soul, Cowboy Mouth

Shinedown, Supagroup, Wylde Bunch

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Nas's new look? Ghetto smurf!

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NAS 101

The King of Queens' five greatest moments on the mic

1 "LIVE AT THE BARBECUE" FROM MAIN SOURCE'S *BREAKING ATOMS*
WILD PITCH, 1991
Batting lead-off on this Main Source posse cut, a rookie Nas shocked the world with his ice-cold flow and nonchalant, Devil-may-care cruelty, bragging that, when he was 12, he "went to hell for snuffing Jesus."

2 "N.Y. STATE OF MIND" FROM NAS'S *ILLMATIC* *COLUMBIA, 1994*
Nas's evocative update to the Billy Joel Big Apple ode was punctuated by one of his most memorable boasts: "I never sleep, 'cause sleep is the cousin of death."

3 "ONE LOVE" *ILLMATIC*
COLUMBIA, 1994
A letter penned in the form of a rap, this was the emotional watershed of his solo debut CD. "One Love" found Nas-the-nurturer steeling his locked-up homeboy for life on the outside, vividly recounting neighborhood tales of cocky, drug-dealing half-pints and backstabbing exes.

4 "ONE MIC" *STILLMATIC*
COLUMBIA, 2001
Barely surviving a three-album slump, this dramatic single – accompanied by a striking video – signaled Nas's return to greatness. With swelling vocal crescendos, a beat nicked from Phil Collins's "In the Air Tonight" and an impassioned, purist core, "One Mic" was Nas's tribute to the sacred order of the MC.

5 "LAST REAL NIGGA ALIVE" *GOD'S SON* *COLUMBIA 2002*
Rival Jay-Z had better one-liners, but this gripping tell-all proved Nas the superior storyteller. Over a groggy, muddy beat, Nas effortlessly spilled the secret mid-1990s alliances and beefs between himself, Biggie, Wu-Tang and a miserably insecure Jay-Z. *HUA HSU*

which he shared two life changes fans hadn't been waiting for.

One was the death of his mother.

"It just started spilling out of me, talking about Mom," he said at the time. "Even as a kid, I knew what I had with her. I saw other kids being treated like animals and said, 'Damn, their mothers don't love them.' That was real hard losing her."

The other was his newfound love with Kelis Rogers.

Kelis and Nas met at P. Diddy's afterparty for the 2002 MTV Video Music Awards, which both had attended reluctantly, they said. A bodyguard arranged the intro then stepped back. By way of greeting, Nas informed Kelis he'd been waiting to make her his wife. She said that sounded good to her. Soon, these two street-boho children were taking long walks in Central Park, attending concerts with Olu Dara (whom Kelis's fashion designer mother and jazz musician father knew from New York's downtown jazz scene) and planning to give Nas's 9-year-old daughter Destiny a couple of new siblings.

"KELIS IS A BRILLIANT GIRL. SHE IS WAY BEYOND HER YEARS."

Nas considers his latest CD, *Streets Disciple*, a retrospective of his heady 13-year career, shifting away from the mid-career pop gestures toward his sparer, tougher beginnings. As Nas says of the record, "It's straight-up where I'm at now." And that isn't all Teks and blunts.

At one point on the record, Kelis sings a snatch of the Dixie Cups' 1950s wedding-band classic "Chapel of Love," kicking off the song "Getting Married," in which Nas spins elaborate fantasies about the Big Day. "This ain't no sucka-for-love shit/This ain't no Huxtable kisses-and-hug shit," spits Nas, who seemingly doth protest too much. It appears we have on our hands a thug in love.

"Kelis is brilliant. She is way beyond her 25 years," Nas says. "The thing is, we're totally different. I'm more reserved, a very quiet individual. But we're different in ways that make us work.

"You can run through a million girls," he adds, "but at the end of the day, you only gonna call back that one you like to talk to."

SO MEET NASTY Nas, God's Son, the thug poet of Queensbridge, 2004 edition. He lives in Manhattan now, Midtown East. He gets on with Kelis's dog Harlem, a Pomeranian. "He's cool," Nas says. "I call him the 'mutt.' " His vices have shifted from weed to Silver Patron and a good cigar, preferably Churchill Romeo and Juliets.

"My girl K just brought me a box from Cuba," Nas says, visibly impressed by this feat of contraband smuggling. "She's a little criminal." His favorite music these days? "Man, I love the Beatles," he says. And he comes to Central Park every day he can: "I read, talk, go on the Internet. And I paint."

Nas has been painting for a while, actually. His favorite artists are Basquiat, Picasso and African-American modernists Leroy Campbell and Ernie Barnes (whose work graced the intro credits to the urban '70s sitcom *Good Times*).

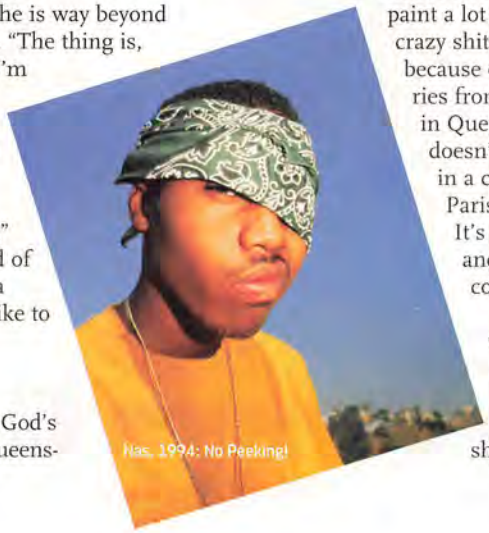
"I got a Leroy Campbell and a Miles Davis," he says. "The Miles is some very abstract shit." Of his own work, he says, "It's, uh, nude women, sky, and trees. . . ."

If you have a hard time fitting all this into your view of the guy who turned gangsta rap into spring-loaded bullets of imagistic verse, Large Professor says you're missing the point. "Nas is really just a cool guy who grew up in a certain situation," he says. "People hear the thug stuff but don't get that he's just incredibly creative in all types of ways."

Sitting in Central Park on this lovely afternoon, Nas reflects on his not-very-gangsta new hobby. "I like to paint from the head," he says, looking out at the rowboats going by on the pond. "Sometimes, I'll have an idea and I'll come out here to the park and work on it." A young couple walks past, the woman giggling.

"But it's funny," he continues, "I'm giving people a chance to look into my head; I let it out. And I paint a lot of dark and crazy shit. I guess it's because of my memories from growing up in Queensbridge. It doesn't matter if I'm in a cathedral in Paris or in Italy. It's still in there, and it's gonna come out."

He pauses, then softly chuckles. "And man. . . some of that shit is *ill*." [BLENDER]


Nas, 1994: No Peeking!

From top: Jan Goederfroit/LFI; Lynn McAfee/Retna Ltd.

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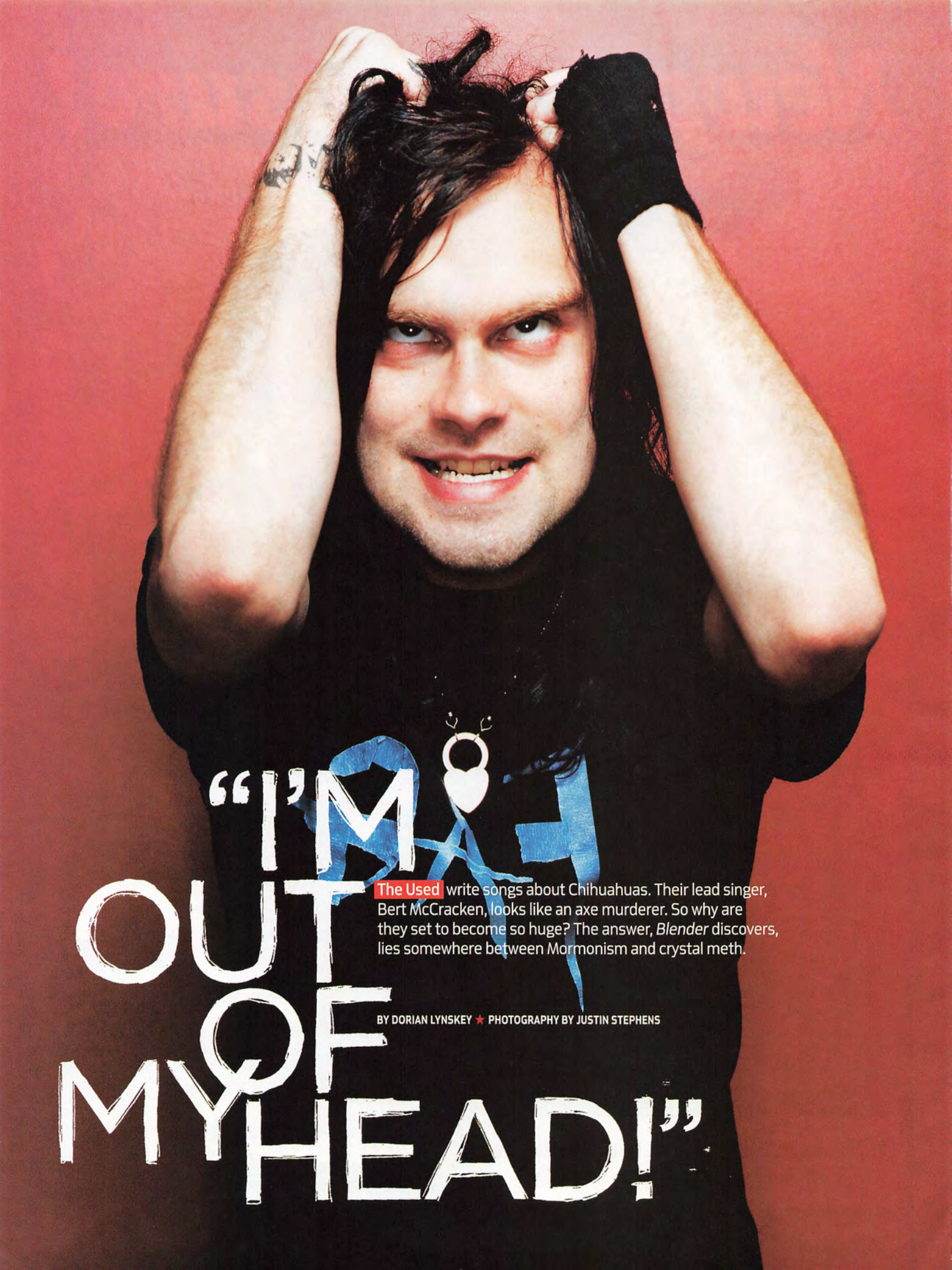


"I'M OUT OF MY HEAD!"

The Used write songs about Chihuahuas. Their lead singer, Bert McCracken, looks like an axe murderer. So why are they set to become so huge? The answer, *Blender* discovers, lies somewhere between Mormonism and crystal meth.

BY DORIAN LYNSKEY ★ PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

IF YOU DIDN'T know who Bert McCracken was, you'd be tempted to give him some spare change. Right now, the Used frontman's life fits into one gray-and-orange backpack upon which he's scribbled the word "Fags." He doesn't have a home as such, and divides his time among hotel rooms, tour buses and his girlfriend's place in Burbank, so this bag is his survival kit: four T-shirts, a bag of toiletries, a cellphone and a magazine. He's been wearing the same pair of long black shorts since last summer's Warped tour. He's washed them, right? "Of course," he protests, grinning. "But I don't wear any underwear."

Just an hour after McCracken's arrival in Salt Lake City, his non-smoking hotel room is foggy with cigarette plumes, and the ice bucket serves as an oversize ashtray. A creaky room-service trolley holds toasted cheese sandwiches and bottles of beer. An old friend offers to roll a joint with Bible paper. A tall blonde vainly attempts to tell McCracken an anecdote.

The singer, however, won't be distracted from his just-completed CD *In Love and Death*, the Used's furious second album. He rocks back and forth on the floor, his eyes red from sleeplessness, his long black hair spilling over his face.

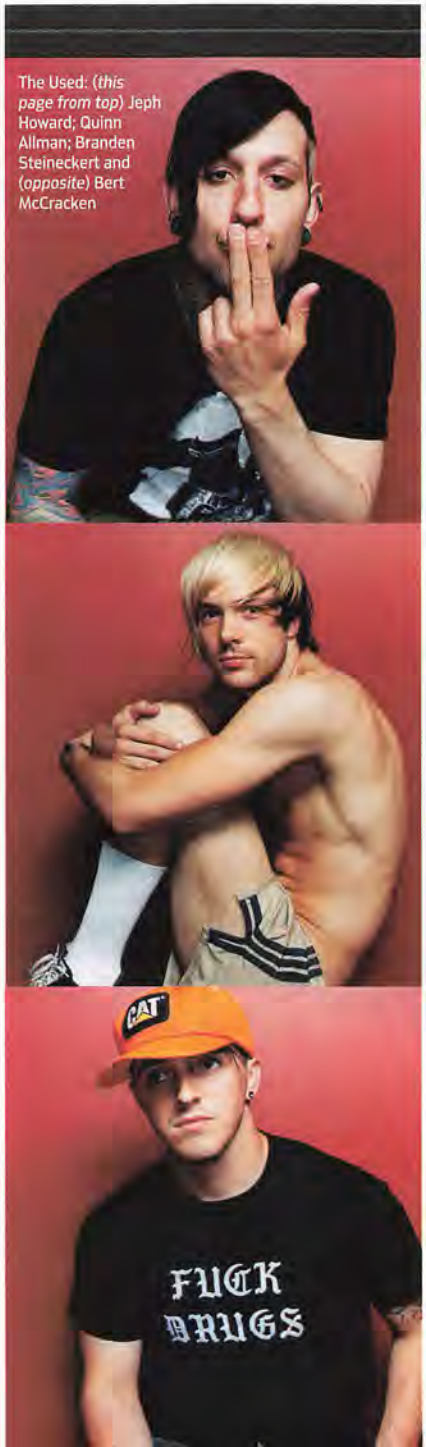
In his 22 years, McCracken has been a Mormon, a Hare Krishna, a straight-edger, a gymnast and a crystal-meth addict. Right now, it's impossible to imagine him functioning as anything other than a rock star. He inhabits a realm of benign chaos, where timekeeping is shown the same cavalier disregard as smoking restrictions.

Sometimes, he does things that don't make much sense, even to himself. Backstage at 2002's KROQ Acoustic Christmas concert in L.A., he was so excited to see Billy Corgan that he stuck out his foot and sent the alt-rock legend flying. Corgan retaliated with a fierce kick to McCracken's ribs. Then, two months later, McCracken ended his tabloid relationship with Kelly Osbourne over his cellphone on Valentine's Day.

"I really freaked out that day," he says, brandishing a cigarette as *In Love and Death* blasts from the stereo. "I'm pretty much out of my own head a lot of times. I feel a lot more crazy than I think that I should feel."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

PRIOR TO THE Used's 2002 self-titled debut, Utah's contributions to American popular music consisted of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the Osmonds. McCracken, oddly, has connections with both: He was a chorister at school, and once played in a straight-edge band with Donny Osmond's son. "[Osmond] was kind of like, 'What's this guy doing screaming?'" McCracken says. "But he was a rocker, too. He knows how it goes."



The Used: (*this page from top*) Jeph Howard; Quinn Allman; Branden Steineckert and (*opposite*) Bert McCracken

The radical contradictions embodied by his home state are etched into the band members' personalities. During the three days *Blender* is in Salt Lake City, a restaurateur is arrested for allowing customers to dance past the legal deadline of 2 A.M. Also in that period, a local free paper calls crystal meth "Utah's drug of choice." Drummer Branden Steineckert sums it up: "People tend to go to extremes here 'cause it's so conservative."

Raised in the strait-laced suburbs of Provo and Orem, a half-hour's drive south of Salt Lake City, all four members of the Used — McCracken, Steineckert, guitarist Quinn Allman and bassist Jeph Howard — grew up as outcasts. As kids, they were frowned upon by Mormons, attacked by straight-edgers, ostracized by family members and arrested by the Provo Police Department.

Later, struggling in a bunch of self-described "god-awful" bands, they panhandled for change and crashed on friends' couches. When those friends turned on them, complaining they felt "used," the band's name was born.

Even the Used's subsequent success (half a million albums sold, triumphant stints on the Ozzfest and Warped tours) provoked suspicion. It stemmed partly from the speed of their rise — and a little from McCracken's habit of screaming so hard he threw up onstage (hence their association with the emo subgenre "screamo"). But mostly it stemmed from a certain high-profile girlfriend, Kelly Osbourne, whom McCracken met during the 2002 Ozzfest, when she mistook him for a roadie. He later figured in two episodes of MTV's *The Osbournes*, much to his discomfort.

"I felt embarrassed for my band, because I knew that it bummed them out," says McCracken. "But at the same time, I didn't give a fuck because I really liked that girl."

This time, the Used are set to be famous for the right reasons. They're playing on Linkin Park's Projekt Revolution tour, and *In Love and Death* is a mighty creative leap forward: a muscularly melodic set of pop-smart hardcore which resembles Coldplay as often as it does Fugazi. Like Kurt Cobain, McCracken can shift gears from a pitch-perfect howl of rage to the kind of angelic croon you could take home to mom. Despite bursts of taut, imagistic angst, his lyrics have a soft center. "All That I've Got" is a passionate tribute not to a lover but to McCracken's late Chihuahua, the imagi- →

Why the Blue Man Group will *never* return to Utah.

natively named David Bowie. The Used are poised to be crossover giants — as long as they can hold it together.

"I'm not really afraid of exploding," says Allman. "I'm afraid of *im*ploding."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"IF YOU DON'T fit a certain mold in Provo, you tend to be looked down upon," Steineckert says of his hometown. "People automatically assume that because I have tattoos or a mohawk that I'm a drug dealer. Between looking like I did and being a skateboarder, I was bad news."

This says more about Provo — a bland sprawl of flat, white buildings that look like they could be packed away at 24 hours' notice — than it does about Steineckert, a courteous, talkative 26 year old who has never had a drink, drug or cigarette in his life. The self-professed "dad of the band" lives in a neat, custom-built house with his girlfriend Spike, a black dog called Radio and a retro diner's worth of 1950s memorabilia. It's hard to imagine anyone less suited to sharing a tour bus with McCracken.

↑ "Good thing I'm not in . . . And You Will Know Us By the Trail of Dead." Steineckert gets tattooed, 2002.

"It's actually very difficult," concedes Steineckert. "I don't think less of Bert for doing what he does, but I see him struggling, and I know all that shit's not helping. I wish he could be happy from the high of playing music. I wish that was enough."

Steineckert's Mormon parents divorced when he was 11. His mom soon remarried and his dad killed himself. Dad played drums, and in tribute to his father, Steineckert took it up. "That was my drug of choice," he says.

"I'M VERY FLAMBOYANT AND LOUD AND OBNOXIOUS AND RUDE."

Steineckert drives *Blender* into Orem, past the run-down, two-bedroom house he and Howard used to rent together. "This is where it all started," he says. "We collected old mattresses and egg crates and then nailed them all over the walls to soundproof it. We'd use my closet as a vocal booth."

Jeph Howard, 25, lives a block away from his old housemate, in a place done up with red walls and black ceilings, half Japanese restaurant, half Edgar Allan Poe. Fittingly, he says he likes Japanese things: girls, horror movies, food and décor, in that order. "If you're a strict Mormon, you can only watch PG movies," Howard says, shaking his head. "They have these stores that edit movies to make them PG. All the movies I like would be 10 minutes long."

If Howard were any more laidback, he'd never leave the house, but even his equanimity was tested by the Used's punishing schedule. "We toured so much that we wanted to kill each other. We almost did, actually."

Howard thinks the Used's chemistry will always be volatile. "Nobody in this band's alike. We're four totally different elements. I don't know what's going to happen from day to day. Bert gets sick a lot. Somebody's missing. Somebody's mad at somebody. There's drama. We could make the best TV series ever. *The Real World* is pussy."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"I'M KIND OF having a brainfuck," Quinn Allman says apologetically. "I have a memory squeegee. Seriously. There's this thing hooked to my head in a different dimension."

The 22 year old is halfway through a sushi meal which, within minutes of leaving the restaurant, he will splatter on a Salt Lake City sidewalk. He has the fallen-angel look of a young, blond John Frusciante and the grogginess of someone who has stayed up all night and slept all day. Half of what he tells *Blender* makes no sense whatsoever.

This evening, his mood is soured by the fact that his parents have recently moved out of his childhood home and into a trailer. "That house was cool," he says. "We'd stay up all night as kids and watch the sun come up." →

Top: Justin Stephens; Below: Joe Toreno (2)

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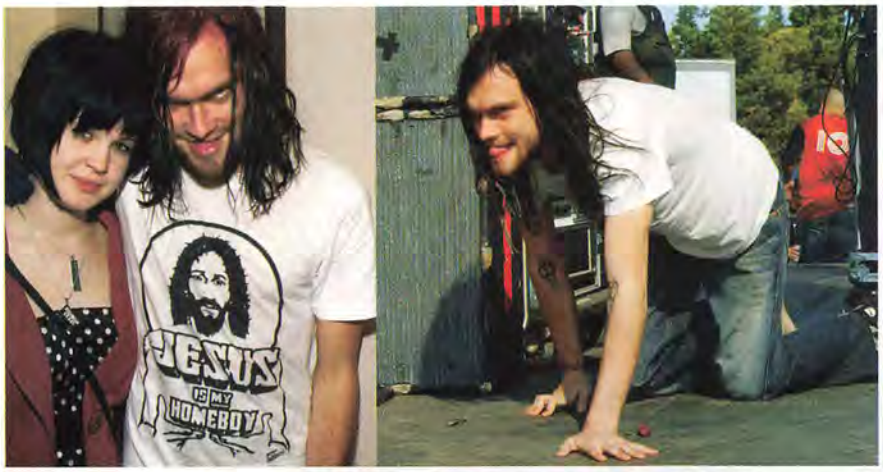


↑ What Would Bert Do? From left, with ex-girlfriend Kelly Osbourne in 2002; onstage in 2003.

Allman's parents have always been liberal anomalies in Utah County. "My dad gave me a crash course in religion early on, so I've always felt pretty alienated. I've never met anyone who had an upbringing like I did — more being against something than really being part of something."

His parents offered an open house to Utah Valley's waifs and strays, one of whom was a post–crystal-meth McCracken. During one fractious period, Allman moved out of the house while McCracken stayed on there.

"He's like my twin brother," the guitarist says. "We're kind of like alter egos — a Tyler Durden kind of thing."

McCracken and Allman's turbulent relationship inspired "Blue and Yellow" on their first album, with its line: "It's all in how you mix the two."

McCracken acknowledges he can be difficult to work with. "I know in my heart that I'm the type of person people can get sick of really easily, because I'm very flamboyant and loud and obnoxious and rude at times," McCracken says. "Not on purpose, just in a joking way."

"I'D BEEN AWAKE FOR SIX DAYS. I WEIGHED 84 POUNDS. I KNEW I WAS GONNA DIE."

It's past midnight and McCracken is sitting cross-legged on the floor of *Blender*'s hotel room. Like Allman, he's preoccupied. Kate, the girl to whom he lost his virginity, died on July 4th. He won't say how, but darkly alludes to "habits" they shared during their five-year relationship.

McCracken's backlash against his parents' Mormon strictures was long, erratic and intense. An actor and star gymnast at school, he started dabbling in other religions, from Catholicism to Hare Krishna. He edited a straight-edge fanzine, until other straight-edgers beat him up.

"Of course it drove me in the exact opposite direction," he says. "I started smoking weed and cigarettes, and a month later, I was taking lines of coke, taking as many pills as I could, drinking every day. Then I found crystal, started using needles, fucked around with heroin, and dropped so much acid that I still don't feel right."

Exiled from the family home since his rejection of Mormonism at the age of 15, McCracken hit rock bottom on Christmas Eve one year. "I'd been awake for six days, took a bunch of valium to try to chill out, and I thought I was having a heart attack. I decided right then and there that I couldn't go on. I weighed 84 pounds. I knew I was gonna die."

His rehab process involved what he describes as "rotting away at my parents' house, watching television sitcoms for about a month and smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. Then I met the Used."

McCracken is still not exactly the picture of health. He may have stopped vomiting onstage, but last year, his Surgeon General-baiting diet of beer, cigarettes and junk food induced a bout of pancreatitis. The Used's most potent ingredient is also the most fragile, as the rest of the band know well.

"Without him, I don't have a career," Steineckert says. "I'm not secure that our band will be together in two years. But that insecurity makes today feel better."

The Bert McCracken who makes enemies is a flaky loudmouth. The one who manages to retain loyal friends and bandmates is a goofy, good-natured optimist. He shows *Blender* his latest tattoo: the word "Love" inscribed on his left wrist.

Love? Why has this crazy-ass king of screamo got something so, well, mushy carved into his arm?

"Because," he says with a sappy grin, "all you need is love." [BLENDER]

(Sidebar) Top to bottom: John Barrett/Globe Photos Inc.; Jim Ruymen/UPI/Newscom.com. (Main story) Top, left to right: Lester Cohen/Wireimage.com; Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images

STORMIN' MORMONS

7 SURPRISINGLY MORMON CELEBRITIES

Polygamy and religious violence aren't the only things coursing through the veins of Mormons. Showbiz, too!

MISANTHROPIC MORMON
NEIL LABUTE
Writer and director of staggeringly nihilistic films like *In the Company of Men*. Often casts Mormon Aaron Eckhart in his movies.

MANGLER MORMON
JIMMY "SUPERFLY" SNUKA
WWF wrestling mainstay best remembered for having a his head smashed with a coco-nut by "Rowdy" Roddy Piper.

MAD-SCIENTIST MORMON
PHILO T. FARNSWORTH
At 14, in 1921, he came up with the idea for the TV. Later became an alcoholic and frittered away his money on nuclear-fusion schemes.

METHOD MORMON
RICKY SCHRODER
Star of the '80s sitcom *Silver Spoons* re-emerged as a flintily inexpressive detective on *NYPD Blue*. Now prefers to be called Rick.

MOVIE-STAR MORMON
PAUL WALKER
The top-grossing Latter Day Saint working in movies, best known for his undercover-cop role in *The Fast and the Furious*. Looks a little like Ricky Schroder.

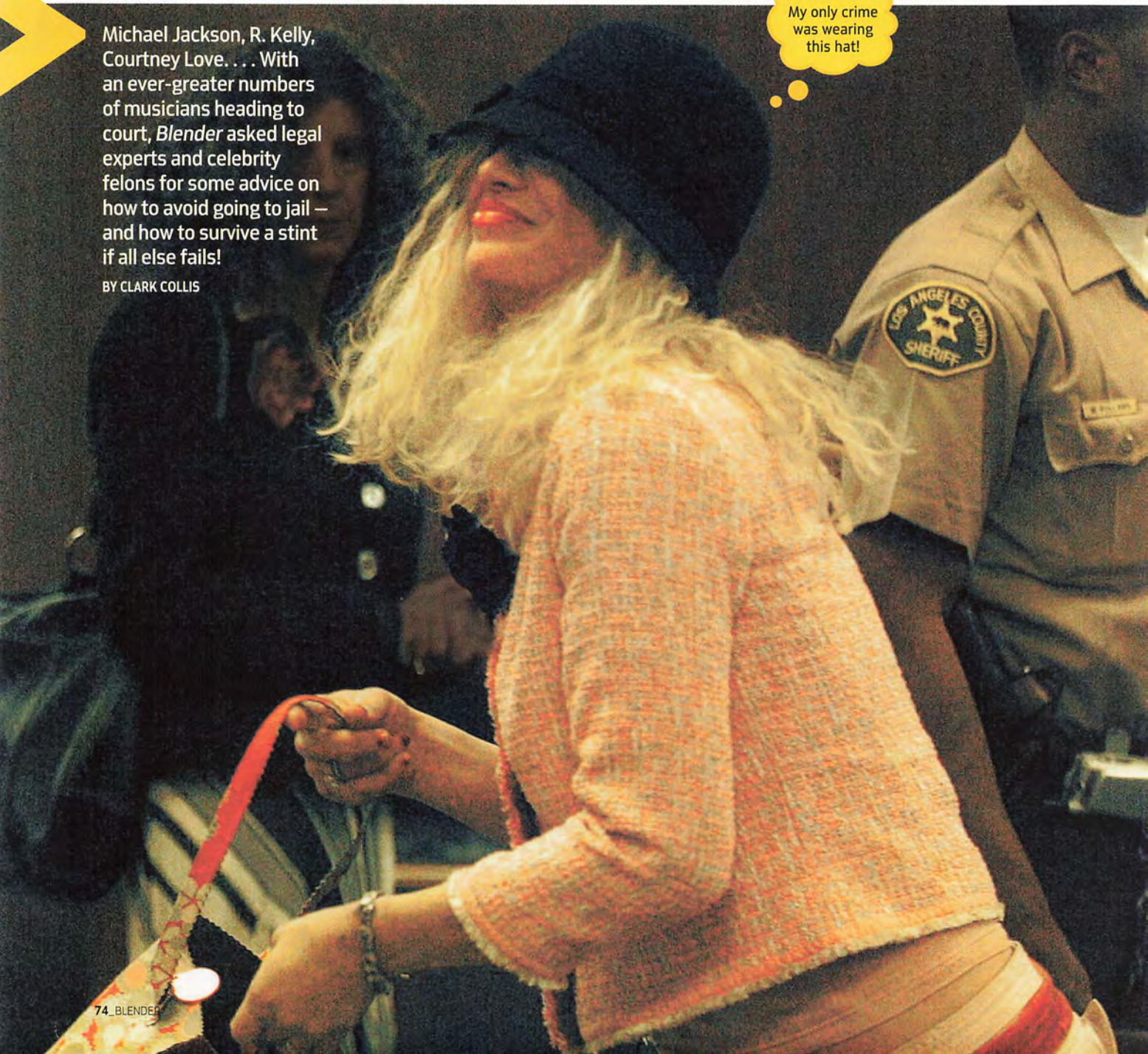
MUSICAL MORMON
ARTHUR "KILLER" KANE
Boozy New York Dolls bassist who, after the Dolls split, went teetotal and converted to Mormonism. He died from leukemia-related complications in July 2004.

MINI-MORMON
BILLY BARTY
The late, 3-foot-9-inch actor-activist founded the Little People of America in 1957. Once lambasted *Fantasy Island*'s Hervé Villechaize for trying to pass as a midget rather than a dwarf. BEN MITCHELL

Billy Barty regrets choice of getaway vehicle.

HOW TO

KEEP YOUR ROCK-STAR ASS OUT OF JAIL!



Michael Jackson, R. Kelly, Courtney Love. . . . With an ever-greater numbers of musicians heading to court, *Blender* asked legal experts and celebrity felons for some advice on how to avoid going to jail — and how to survive a stint if all else fails!

BY CLARK COLLIS

ROCK-STAR DOs AND DON'Ts!

1
DON'T TELL THE COPS NOTHIN'!

Whether you've been caught going two miles an hour over the speed limit or sodomizing an underage goat on crack, the most important thing is to keep your mouth shut.

"Never, ever make a statement to the authorities," says defense attorney "Don't Worry" Murray Richman, who has represented Jay-Z, DMX and Irv Gotti. "The police are not your friend if you're a suspect."

Anyone needing further proof should consider Ol' Dirty Bastard, who was handed a two-to-four year jail sentence in 2001 after asking officers to make the crack they found in his possession "disappear."

"That's a bad idea," Richman says.

2
DON'T BE A RAPPER

"There's no question in my mind rappers are targeted by police," Richman says. "Many cops have said, 'Well, if we follow rappers, they'll lead us to a crime – somewhere along the line it'll all go bad.' "

"I think police target G-Unit," says the group's Tony Yayo, who recently served 12 months at New York State correctional facilities on gun charges. "Police will look at my rap sheet and go wild: 'We're gonna watch this guy every fucking day!' I got all kinds of charges, from drugs to guns. I got a transmitter in my ankle. I understand why they watch us. But a guy's trying to change his life over. I ain't got to be on the corner slinging crack no more. So give me a break!"

3
DON'T NAME YOURSELF "TONY YAYO"

Or do! The man who might as well be called Tony I've-Got-a-Big-Bag-of-Nose-Candy claims his name had little to do with his legal problems. "Actually, I don't think being called 'Tony Yayo' was a problem with the police," says the rapper, whose real name is Marvin Bernard. "I've been selling drugs since I was 15. I had police problems before."

It's also probably best to avoid having the word "murder" in your stage name, lest you wind up on trial for that crime, which is what happened to rapper C-Murder in September 2003. Mr. Murder – real name: Corey Miller – was found guilty, though a state judge later ordered a new trial.

4
DO GET YOURSELF A GOOD LAWYER

There have been several examples of rock stars who acted as their own attorney, notably British indie-rocker Kirk Brandon, who did so in a failed civil-action suit against Boy George. But Murray Richman wholeheartedly endorses the old legal adage that anyone who represents himself has a fool for a client.

Legendary trial lawyer Gerry Spence, however, argues that the most high-profile attorney (or "carriage-trade lawyer") may not necessarily be the best hire for a celebrity keen to avoid becoming roomies with a guy called Big Butch.

"Carriage-trade lawyers know how to play the press," Spence says. "But too often, their skill is in forwarding their own fame – to the injury of the client. The best trial lawyers are busy fighting in the trenches in remote jurisdictions. Handling the media may be a desirable skill, but handling the case is the most important."

5
DON'T BE LATE

It's always rude to keep people waiting. But it's just plain psychotic to be tardy for an appearance before a judge who will ultimately decide whether you should go to jail or not – something that both Michael Jackson and Courtney Love have both done this past year.

"Arriving late to court is a bad move," Richman says. "Did you see Courtney Love? Six hours late? The judge sits there, and he's going to be pissed. And she comes in and she doesn't seem to be *compos mentis*? Wow. That's devastating!"

"MICHAEL JACKSON WILL BE SOMEBODY'S *GIRLFRIEND* IN JAIL." –TONY YAYO

6
DO LEAVE THE BLING-BLING AT HOME

Think you look like a total thug with all those chains around your neck? Well, so will the jury. Which is why you should follow the example of Eminem and countless other mean hombre defendants: Turn up in court as if you've been dressed by your mom.

"You have to present people in a socially acceptable way," Richman says. "I actually have suits and ties and everything in my office." Do clients ever object to wearing suits? "Sometimes. I'm not going to say who, but one rapper said, 'That ain't my fuckin' persona.' And he didn't wear the suit. Did he get off? Yes, of course."

Peter Stemmler (all illustrations)

TIPS FOR SURVIVING "THE BING"!

7
DO DRUGS AT TRIAL (TO PROVE YOU'RE NUTS!)

When Allman Brothers tour manager Twiggs Lyndon killed a club owner with a 10-inch knife, his defense was based on the idea that touring with the Allmans would drive *anybody* nuts. At his 1971 trial, one of the witnesses was bassist Berry Oakley, who was high on methadone and repeatedly left the stand to vomit. When asked if he'd done drugs in the last hour, Oakley said, "You bet!" Lyndon was found not guilty by reasons of insanity.

8
DON'T DANCE ON TOP OF YOUR LIMO

That is, of course, exactly what Michael Jackson did on January 16 to reward his horde of fans after his arraignment, which charged him with seven counts of child molestation and two of administering an intoxicant to a minor.

"Oh, god," Richman says with a sigh. "You know, I almost feel sorry for him. He's well represented, but I'm not sure he [understands] the gravity of the situation."

9
DON'T BE TAPED PEEING ON UNDERAGE GIRLS

An obvious "Don't," perhaps, but one allegedly ignored by R. Kelly, who is facing a variety of child-pornography charges.

"Anytime you've got a tape, that's a pretty powerful testimony," says Catherine Crier, legal journalist and Court TV anchorwoman. "I started prosecuting criminal cases in 1978 – nothing surprises me anymore. When [it is a] sexual offense, videotaping is, I think, more common, so you can replay the event."

10
DO "SMACK A COUPLE OF NIGGAS"

Should you find yourself in general population, it may be necessary to protect your ass by, as Yayo says, "smacking a couple of niggas." On the other hand, pacifists might follow Ol' Dirty Bastard, who says that after receiving sexual threats in jail, he refused to bathe. Says his lawyer: "He's like, 'I got this big-ass man telling me what to do – I think I'm going to stay dirty!' "

11
DO REQUEST SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Yes, solitary confinement is usually a punishment, but probably not as much of a punishment as having a fellow con decide to make you his bitch. High-profile celebrities, such as Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee, who served time for spousal abuse in 1998, are routinely put in cells on their own. "You may have people who want to do nothing more than show that this bad boy ain't so bad," Crier says. "Prisons aren't safe places to be."

12
DON'T, DON'T, *DON'T* BE MICHAEL JACKSON

"You know the advice I would give celebrities about being in jail?" Yayo muses. "Stay out! I'm gonna be honest with you, a lot of people couldn't survive it. The only reason I'm used to it is the way I grew up and where I'm from. Michael Jackson in jail? Come on, let's get serious. Michael Jackson will be someone's *girlfriend* in jail."

"Mr. Kelly pees, er, *pleads* not guilty."

EXPERT WITNESSES

MURRAY RICHMAN
Defense attorney who once told the *New York Times* he dresses his clients "to kill – and they may have."

TONY YAYO
Much imprisoned G-Unit rapper. Now working on his solo LP, most of which was written while incarcerated.

CATHERINE CRIER
Former judge turned author and TV legal expert, Catherine Crier is the host of Court TV's daily show *Catherine Crier Live*.

GERRY SPENCE
One of the most famous lawyers in the country, Spence is also the author of *How To Argue and Win Every Time*.

Bottom, from left: Rick Fowler/Reuters/Landov; Richard Levine/Photographer Showcase/Newscom; Aviv Small/Zuma Press/Newscom; Gina James/Graylock.com/Retna Ltd.; Adam Nadel/AP Wide World. Peter Stemmler (all illustrations)

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THE GOLDEN GIRL

While her showbiz peers were off having their nipples pierced, angel-faced TV, movie and music star **Hilary Duff** quietly won the hearts and wallets of millions of American girls. But is the 16 year old really as wholesome as she seems? "Well, I no longer relate to lollipops," she declares.

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE LEVITT

DRESS BY **TEMPERLEY**; FUR CAPE BY **SPR FOR TREE**; SHOES BY **SIGERSON MORRISON**; RING BY **KAVIAR + KIND**; NECKLACE BY **SKULL AT SATINE**; BRACELET BY **DOVE AND VIONETTE**; PINK BANGLE FROM **APARTMENT 3**

Hilary Duff: "*Please* tell me that's not Tommy Lee's kit."

DRESS: BY TULEH; SHOES: BY CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN; EARRINGS AND NECKLACE: BY KAVIAR + KIND

WHEN SHE FINALLY breezes into the hospitality room of Fairfax, Virginia's Patriot Center, all blonde hair and pink lipstick and the brightest smile this side of a toothpaste commercial, there is a collective sigh of relief.

Okay, sure, she may be trailed by her tour manager, sister and mother-manager, and it will be stipulated that her publicist must remain in the room at all times while we talk, but she is nevertheless here, in the flesh and up close, just as we were thinking it would never happen.

Blender has been trying to tie Hilary Duff down — metaphorically, of course — for several weeks now. This has been no easy task because the 16-year-old starlet has protection to rival the President's. Were documentary filmmaker Michael Moore to ever attempt a film on her, he'd come away empty-handed, because even if the singer's bodyguards failed in hampering his efforts, her "momager," Susan Duff, surely wouldn't.

Susan Duff has a certain way about her. It's in the eyes and the rigid set of her teeth. She may be small and compact, standing no taller than *Blender*'s chest, but don't be fooled by anything so insignificant as her size.

"I do have a reputation for being extremely tough," she concedes, leaning back at a 45-degree angle to make eye contact. "And you know what? I don't care. When it comes to my daughter, I will do anything possible to protect her."

Before *Blender* was granted access onto her daughter's first-ever national tour, there were several conditions that had to be met. We could not, for example, stay at the same hotel as Hilary, nor were we allowed any access to her on her days off. We were not permitted within spitting distance of her dressing room, nor her tour bus. There would be no chance of ever getting her alone, and we would receive no more than 30 minutes with her at a time.

"This can be a very twisted business," Susan says, "but it's my job to do the best I can for my child. If that means adding an ugly reputation into the bargain, fine by me."

As a matter of course, no one would fully trust us, and we would be viewed with extreme caution, a potential enemy. If any of the rules were contravened, Mom could decide to have *Blender* immediately tossed off the tour. Who knows? If really angered, she could even arrange to have us whacked. Hey, it happens.

There are, of course, good reasons for this. Her daughter is one of the most successful and influential teenagers in America today, a 21st-century Doris Day who sings and acts so winningly that it has garnered her a rumored $25 million fortune. As TV's "Lizzie McGuire," a likeable, above-average high-school girl whose tender growing pains quickly found empathy with a viewing audience of over 20 million, she became something of a tween-girl icon — less sexified than Britney, more approachable than the Olsens.

But since becoming a singer 12 short months ago, she has been the target of a lot of criticism from the press *and* her peers, particularly actress Lindsay Lohan, who has publicly derided her with compulsive frequency. This is something Hilary had never experienced in her 16 years, and it caused so much hurt that her mom went into protective overdrive.

While Hilary herself may be blissfully unaware of just how contrived is the bubble in which she exists, a positively Herculean effect goes into keeping her wrapped up in cotton wool these days. Her sunny disposition must be maintained above all else.

"What you have to understand," her mother says, "is that as far as Hilary is concerned, she is a completely ordinary American girl. And I plan to see to it that it stays that way."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

HILARY DUFF WAS born on September 28, 1987, in Houston, Texas. Her father, Bob, ran a string of convenience stores

Set Design by Piers Hammer; styling by Rachel Sanderson; makeup by Rachel Goodwin for Giorgio Armani at Magnet; hair by Mark Townsend for Kiehl's at Magnet

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NEW
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BODY WASH
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glacial falls

Glacial Falls also available in Body Spray & Invisible Solid.

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across America's warmest state, and her mother sold cosmetics. When she was 9, she, older sister Haylie and Mom left Dad to tend the family business while they tried their luck at making it big in Los Angeles. Two years of failed auditions followed and then, aged 12, she landed the titular role on *Lizzie McGuire*, which went on to become the most successful Disney children's TV show in the company's history.

At 15, she branched out into movies, appearing in a range of box-office hits: *The Lizzie McGuire Movie, Agent Cody Banks, Cheaper by the Dozen* and, most recently, *A Cinderella Story*. In each, she essentially plays an extension of herself, a sweet, wholesome girl who shuns the very notion of bad behavior and instead exemplifies the benefits of a decent upbringing. These characters, like Duff herself, have never slammed shut a bedroom door in their lives, never found solace in Eminem. In short, the characters she plays — and Hilary herself — are the kind of daughter every mom would want. All of which combines to make her box-office gold.

In 2003, she decided to become a pop star because "it seemed like fun," and used her power and influence to procure some of the biggest producers and songwriters around today. The resulting *Metamorphosis*, a masterfully executed tour through contempo mall-pop, '80s new-wave bubblegum and girl-power affirmations, was the year's eighth best-selling album, shifting the bulk of its almost five million copies to a constituency comprised mostly of under-12s. Currently, she is managing something both Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera have failed: a sold-out summer tour. She has two more films in the can, and on her 17th birthday this year, she'll release her second album, simply titled *Hilary Duff*, which she hopes will take a great many people by surprise. Why? Because Hilary has learned to rock.

"I feel so blessed," she says, smiling demurely. The stripped lighting overhead bounces off her blonde hair and almost, but not quite, creates a kind of halo.

Speak to anyone around her and they'll tell you Duff is as affable and grounded as her public persona. She is complimented for being down-to-earth, vivacious and adorable — *and* for her phenomenal drive. Even sister Haylie, a 19 year old who probably has more reasons to resent Hilary than most, offers nothing but glowing endorsements.

"She is just so talented," Haylie coos. It was Haylie's acting and singing ambitions that first took the Duff clan to Hollywood, and although Haylie is currently supporting her sister on tour, she remains very firmly in her sibling's shadow. Her own debut album has been ready for some time now but will only come out when Hilary has sufficiently basked in the limelight unhindered.

"I know that my time will come," Haylie says, "and so meantime, I'm just happy to watch Hilary enjoy everything that's coming her way."

As Chairman of the Buena Vista Music Group, a division of the Walt Disney Company, Bob Cavallo has been instrumental in Hilary's music career. He, too, is full of admiration.

"Sure, she's cute and wholesome," he says, "but she is also talented, intelligent, essentially decent and humble. You put those things together, along with incredible focus, and that really is something special. Look at what she's achieved: In one year alone, she's made two albums, contributed four songs to the *Cinderella* soundtrack, gone on tour and filmed three movies. On top of that, she's done countless promotional duties and yet remains cool, calm and collected. That, to me, is pretty amazing."

Little wonder, then, that Duff is so disarmingly buoyant. But, she insists, a little reality has crashed headlong into her life of late. Her father, who continues to remain in Texas but visits every three weeks, has been called upon whenever she has felt down and depressed, which is increasingly often.

"There is absolutely no way you can prepare yourself for criticism," she says, "and I've had a lot of it recently. At first, everybody thought I was a joke for trying to become a pop star. Then certain people didn't like my music, and for some reason they didn't like the fact that I had my own clothing line [Stuff by Hilary Duff]. Suddenly, I seemed to be, like, the butt of all these jokes."

Avril Lavigne was one of her most vocal detractors, and when word came that Duff had criticized Lavigne's own lack of respect for her fans, the surly Canadian promptly lashed out.

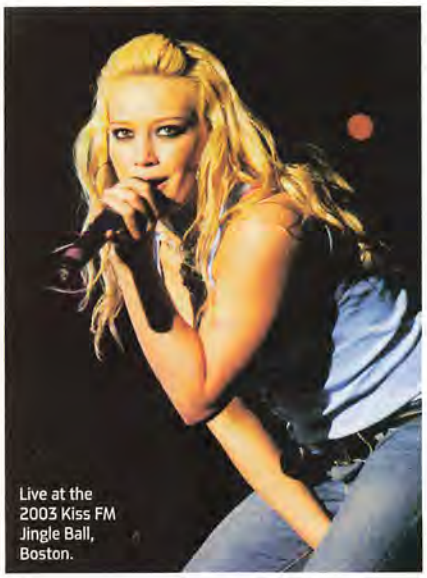
"If she doesn't shut her mouth," Lavigne said, "then I'll shut it for her."

Hilary, of course, was immediately repentant. "I really didn't mean to offend Avril at all, but when I did, she hit back by calling me a goody-goody, and said that I'm all smiles." She shrugs and blushes slightly. "Okay, I guess I'm fine with that. I am a happy person, and I *do* smile a lot.→

↑ The family that strikes million-dollar deals together, stays together! With father Bob and momager Susan.

← Awwww. . . Hilary Duff at age 8.

"SUDDENLY, I SEEM TO BE THE BUTT OF ALL THESE JOKES."



Live at the 2003 Kiss FM Jingle Ball, Boston.

Clockwise from top left: Courtesy of the Duff Family; Giulio Marcocchi/Getty Images; Boston Herald/Rex/USA

But just because I don't go out and party like other young Hollywood types and stay out until 5 o'clock in the morning, doesn't necessarily mean I'm a goody-goody, does it?

"It's not like I stay home knitting, you know . . . ."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

WHILE SHE REFUSES to apologize for her *Little House on the Prairie* image, Hilary is nevertheless growing up and increasingly keen to leave behind the persona that made her so famous in the first place. Her second album, recorded once again with Lavigne's former producers, the Matrix, is a clear response to her critics with its amplified snarl, its unexpected reliance upon guitars, and its songs like "Haters," in which the singer's real feelings step out from behind the bright showbiz smile.

This new-found aggression is also much in evidence in her live shows. While she's hardly Karen O, she has never sounded less blonde than on new songs like "The Girl Can Rock," or, for that matter, her rather bemusing version of The Who's "My Generation."

"Well, I'm not going to be singing about lollipops because I no longer relate to lollipops," she reasons. But neither is she going to be singing about sex. This

On the red carpet at the premiere for *Cheaper By the Dozen*, 2003.

"IT'S NOT LIKE I STAY HOME KNITTING, YOU KNOW..."

marks her out as almost unique in a pop world that relies upon lust. Even Lavigne sings about sex, albeit in a manner of avoidance. In a strict maintenance of her wholesome image, Hilary gives the subject a wide berth. Onstage, she remains the anti-Britney, dressed in a high-neck top, jeans and sneakers, and she says she will simply *never* go there in song.

"No, I don't do that," she says, firmly. "My music isn't forward like that. It's not sexual the way Britney's music is sexual. She feels comfortable singing about that, and that's fine, but I just don't talk about that kind of stuff, sorry."

Why not?

"I just don't."

Otherwise, Hilary maintains, she is a regular 16 year old.

"And I want the songs I sing to reflect that. Basically, I'm not Lizzie McGuire anymore."➔

MEEEOWWW! The greatest celebrity catfights of all time

1 HILARY DUFF VS. LINDSAY LOHAN

WHAT HAPPENED: First, kiddie heartthrob-turned-horndog Aaron Carter ditched girlfriend Lohan for Duff. Then, Hilary and mom were accused of trying to kick Lohan out of a movie-premiere party, and Lohan responded by ragging on Duff in an *SNL* sketch. *Mean Girls*. Like, for real!

WINNER: Lohan was likely the wronged woman. Plus, her show-biz parents save the fighting for family gatherings, not public events.

2 LIZA MINNELLI VS. DAVID GEST

WHAT HAPPENED: Last year, the 16-month, totally-not-bogus marriage between Liza Minnelli and her way-heterosexual husband David Gest ended. Badly. The ghoul-faced Gest sued Minnelli for $10 million, accusing her of beating him silly.

WINNER: Liza in a TKO.

3 TONYA HARDING VS. NANCY KERRIGAN

WHAT HAPPENED: When Tonya Harding's villainously mustachioed husband conspired to kneecap his trailer-trash wife's archrival just before the 1994 Winter Olympics, it did more than ignite controversy. It made figure skating interesting.

WINNER: Kerrigan—she limped away from the Olympics with a silver medal. Meanwhile, Harding received 8th place, a $100,000 fine and a lifetime of *Celebrity Boxing* guest stints.

4 SHANNEN DOHERTY VS. PARIS HILTON

WHAT HAPPENED: In March 2003, *90210* alum Doherty spotted Hilton canoodling with Doherty's ex-husband, Rick Salomon. Hilton says Doherty attacked her, then trashed her car with eggs, red lipstick and Vaseline. Doherty's reps denied the vandalism, saying, "She doesn't wear red lipstick."

WINNER: Doherty.

Salomon videotaped himself having sex with Paris, turning the Hilton heiress into an international star. Actually, Paris wins after all!

5 LILLIAN HELLMAN VS. MARY MCCARTHY

WHAT HAPPENED: For nearly 40 years, urbane authors Hellman and McCarthy made bitch slapping cerebral. The feces hit the fan in '79 when McCarthy said of Hellman, "Every word she writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the.' " Hellman fired back with a libel suit that ended when Hellman died in '84.

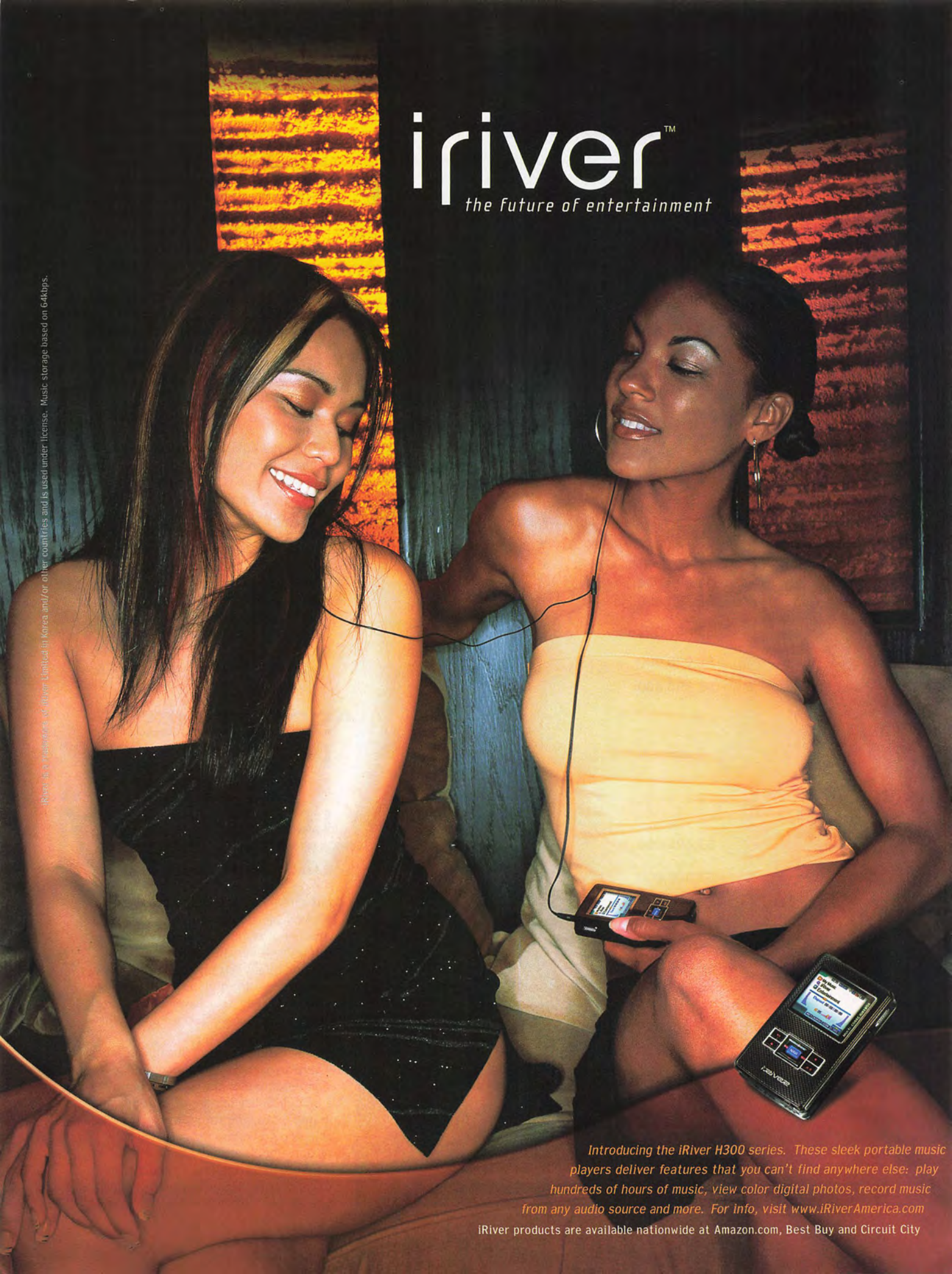
WINNER: McCarthy. Real warriors don't hide behind their lawyers. Or die of old age.

6 QUEEN ELIZABETH VS. MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

WHAT HAPPENED: Convinced her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, was involved in a scheme to steal the throne, Queen Elizabeth had the uppity Scot imprisoned for 19 years. Ye olde catfighte turned real ugly when Mary was later implicated in a plot to assassinate the Queen.

WINNER: Elizabeth, by a head. The Queen ended the rivalry by sending Mary to the chopping block.

Clockwise from top: Albert L. Ortega/Wireimage.com; George Pimentel/Wireimage.com; Jason Squires/Wireimage.com; David Tazzyman (illustration)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LIKE, *KA-CHING!*

Hilary Duff: Actress. Singer. Brand. Based on interviews with entertainment industry experts, *Blender* estimates that by her 17th birthday, Duff will be worth more than $24 million. Here's how Hilary earns her allowance. PETER KAFKA

TELEVISION

Lizzie McGuire series (2001–2004):	$975,000
Development deal at CBS:	$400,000
Development deal at MTV:	$150,000
Subtotal:	**$1,525,000**

MOVIES

The Lizzie McGuire Movie (2003):	$1,000,000
Cheaper By the Dozen (2003):	$1,000,000
A Cinderella Story (2004):	$2,200,000
Raise Your Voice (in production, 2004):	$2,000,000
The Perfect Man (in production, 2004):	$2,000,000
Subtotal:	**$8,200,000**

MUSIC

Concert tour (2004, tickets plus merchandise):	$3,600,000
Metamorphosis CD (2003):	$3,000,000
Hilary Duff CD (advance):	$3,000,000
Subtotal:	**$9,600,000**

MERCHANDISE

Stuff by Duff line:	$5,000,000

TOTAL ESTIMATED EARNINGS: $24,325,000

No, she isn't, and her mother's intervention was instrumental in that character's demise after just three years. Last year, negotiations for Hilary to star in the sequel to the first *Lizzie McGuire* movie broke down, and along with them all hopes of keeping the TV series alive. Sources claim the deal was effectively tabled as a result of Susan Duff's demands for a ridiculously inflated pay packet.

"We very much wanted to continue the *Lizzie* franchise," Disney's Production Chief Nina Jacobson said at the time, "but every deal has its tipping point. Unfortunately, that's the point we reached in the *Lizzie* negotiations, and we ultimately had to say goodbye."

Susan's version of the events differs wildly.

"Sure, I do drive a hard bargain, but all that's been so wrongly reported," she says with a sigh. "And how surprising that Disney didn't want to take the heat, but instead claimed it as all my fault. No, really — how surprising."

According to Susan, she had demanded — and Disney had agreed to — a $5 million paycheck for Hilary. The problems began, according to Susan, when the studio failed to show her daughter a sufficient amount of respect. That was her tipping point.

"Okay, so I made enemies with Disney," she says. "But it's not like I've fallen

"SOMETIMES I REALLY HATE LINDSAY LOHAN."

out with the rest of Hollywood. I have perfectly good relationships with a great number of studios, and Hilary's movie future looks very bright indeed."

She might be right, because while her most recent offering, the saccharine *A Cinderella Story*, may have been mauled by critics, it grossed $40 million in just three weeks.

"For some reason," Susan continues, "there are so many rumors of ugliness surrounding us right now. There must be a lot of jealousy out there. Take this one example: Apparently, we threw a certain actress off a certain red-carpet event recently, but that so did not happen."

She's referring to the premiere of *Cheaper by the Dozen* last year, at which, it was alleged, Hilary flew into a rage when →

Kwaku Alston/Corbis Outline (Hilary Duff); Photodisc Blue (cash pile); The Everett Collection (TV); Walt Disney/The Kobal Collection (Movies)

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Screw you, Simpsons! Sisters Haylie and Hilary

Wanna go to the prom? Right, with Good Charlotte's Joel Madden; below, With Aaron Carter.

Mean Girls star — and Hilary Duff nemesis — Lindsay Lohan showed up.

"Let's go off the record here, because I've got some things to tell you about that little lady," Susan says. As she makes the private revelations, her sculpted eyebrows scale her forehead, and her voice rises several octaves.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

TWO DAYS LATER, Hilary and her entourage arrive in Hershey, Pennsylvania, to play to 15,000 screaming fans in training bras at the Giant Center. Since we last met, it would appear that mother and daughter have rethought their game plan. Hilary has never previously spoken about Lohan, preferring to maintain a dignified silence. Now, in light of her mother's candor, she feels it no longer necessary to hold her tongue.

"The thing is, it's all so childish and immature," Hilary begins. "This all started because we both dated [pint-sized pop star] Aaron Carter, and she went around telling everybody that I was a horrible person who had stolen her boyfriend. She then got pissed off because I worked with Chad Michael Murray [on *Cinderella*] after she had worked with him on *Freaky Friday*. She called him up and said all these awful things about me, which she then repeated to the press. I don't think I can take it anymore. It's so hurtful. Sometimes I feel like I really hate her, which is pretty extreme for me, because I don't hate anybody."

Here she pauses, and actually measures her breath.

"Sometimes, I really feel like Lizzie McGuire. Her alter ego can say anything she wants while Lizzie can't, and that's exactly how I feel. If you accept [Lohan's version of the story], I'm really jealous of her 'cause she has friends in the industry and likes to go out and party while I stay at home. She's always trying to spread stories about me, but the funny thing is, I know so many stories about her that I could tell you right now, but I'm not going to, because I don't think people should know. I don't want her to get mad at me for telling them. And you know what the funny thing is in all this? I just want us to be friends — that's all."

More silence now, a tiny V forming between her eyebrows.

"I'm worried I may have said too much," she says. "Have I?"

One hour later, Duff is halfway through her show. The Giant Center is alive with hysterical middle-school screaming, and the singer appears to be imbuing the track "Haters" with even more passion than she did in Fairfax two nights previously. Clearly, this is going to become something of an anthem for her.

Post-show, she is all smiles.

"That was so much fun," she beams.

"You know, I *do* love my job, really I do, despite all the pressures and the stress. I don't want to become one of those child stars who fades into obscurity the moment they turn 20. I've got plans and ambitions, and if anything, I want to become even more famous than I am now. And I am prepared to work for it."

Work, she confesses, is all she ever does these days. While she has a close circle of friends — girls she grew up with in Los Angeles who visit her on film sets and on tour to keep her company and, as Mom says, "normal" — she can no longer indulge in her favorite passion of shopping because of her endless workload. Having recently graduated from high school after several years of home schooling, she's entertaining the idea of college but, again, has a career to pursue first, a career, she says, of "amazing opportunities."

And so while *Lizzie McGuire* fades into TV history, Duff is growing up and moving on. While she claims to be far too busy for boyfriends, there are currently dark rumors that she is obsessed with one of the Good Charlotte twins. And if this isn't enough to horrify a fanbase which still knows nothing of tattoos and alienation, she plans to further buck expectation some time next year with a new film, her darkest to date.

"It's going to be really edgy and tense. I'll play this really screwed-up girl who shocks everyone with the stuff that comes out of her mouth."

Hilary Duff swearing?

"Oh, there'll be plenty of bad language," she says with a grin.

Later, in one of the venue's interminable corridors, Susan corners *Blender*. She makes eye contact, and doesn't blink. Only after a frozen moment does she permit herself a smile.

"Hey," she says, "write good things about my daughter, OK?" [BLENDER]

"I WANT TO BECOME EVEN *MORE* FAMOUS!"

Clockwise from top left: Dennis Van Tine/LFI; X17agency.com; Peter Brooker/Rex USA; Danielle Levitt

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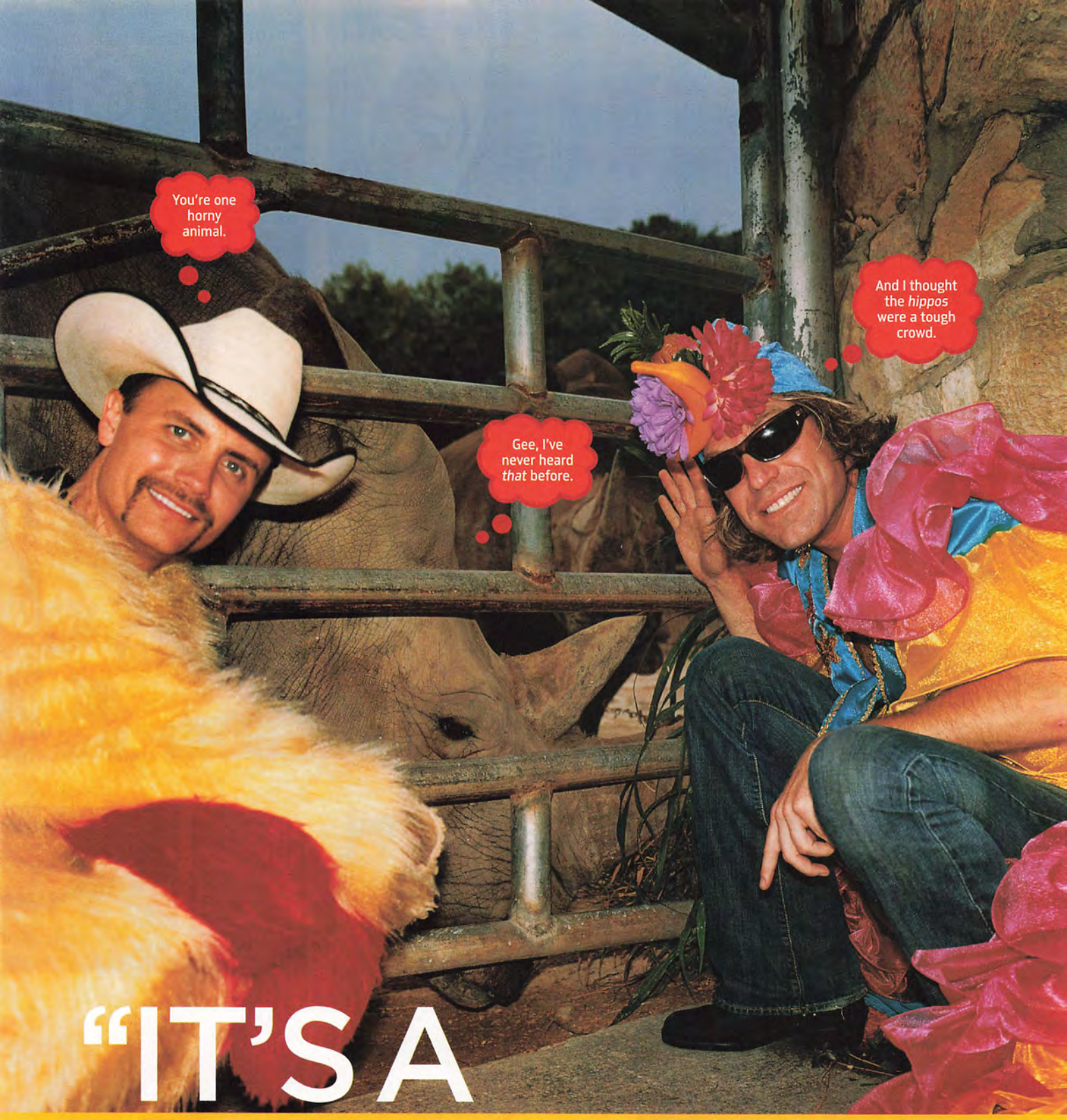

"IT'S A FREAK PARADE!"

Country's newest stars **Big & Rich** prove that it is possible to spend $848 at a zoo — by dressing like chickens, fondling rhinos and giving away monkeys.

BY CLARK COLLIS ★ PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE TORENO

"I WANT TO BE A CHICKEN!" announces John Rich, one half of country music's latest sensations Big & Rich. "So I can walk around choking myself all day." Yes, it may be just 9:30 on an already hotter-than-hell morning in San Antonio, Texas. And, yes, Rich may be suffering from a "tequila, wine, Crown and beer hangover." But the man still knows his way around a masturbation joke.

Not that Rich is joking about his intention to be a chicken, or, at least, dress like one. Big & Rich have decided to spend their $848 on a trip to the San Antonio Zoo, where *Blender* has arranged for them to "pet" a rhinoceros.

Since this won't actually eat up much of the money — or, thanks to the generosity of the zoo administration, *any* of the money — they are opting to do it in dress-up. Which is why Rich is currently in a costume shop clambering into a chicken outfit while his musical partner, Big Kenny, tries on a fetching, if too small, Carmen Miranda get-up.

"Kenny, you're looking very metrosexual," the perpetually wisecracking Rich, 30, says.

"It's very itchy," says 40-year-old Big, who, with his flowing locks and enthusiastic but laidback demeanor, comes off like an amiable cult leader. "But I feel amazingly comfortable in it."

Balancing a fruit-adorned hat on his head, Big considers his reflection in a mirror and declares himself satisfied with the utterly ludicrous result before demanding, "Can you think of one other artist in country music who would do this?"

Blender cannot. But then, the duo is far from being your average country act. Where most honky-tonkers name-check Nashville icons and have guest pedal-steel–guitar players, Big & Rich tip a lyrical hat to Led Zeppelin and perform with a 6-foot-5-inch-tall black rapper named Cowboy Troy.

Despite — or, they would argue, because of — this eclectic, genre-hopping approach, their Nashville-based Muzik Mafia collective has become the hippest country grouping since Willie Nelson's tradition-tweaking Outlaws back in the '70s. Mafia member Gretchen Wilson scored a huge hit earlier this year with "Redneck Woman," which Rich co-wrote and co-produced, while their jam nights in Nashville have attracted everyone from Martina McBride to Kid Rock.

The duo's own debut album, *Horse of a Different Color*, is firmly lodged in the *Billboard* Top 10, and they are currently on the road supporting country megastar Tim McGraw, which accounts for their presence in San Antonio today.

"I've been surprised by how quickly our success has come," Rich says as we drive across town to the zoo. "But we didn't make a record *not* to sell a lot of copies. People have said that we're defiling country. But that's exactly what people said about Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson." →

Big & Rich, from left: Kenny Big and John Rich.

SPEND OUR CASH!

THE BAND
Big & Rich

THE MISSION
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THE REASON
Blender asked them to!

↓ Big & Rich attempt to locate exactly where they misplaced their dignity.

"I THINK I STILL HAVE THE SMELL OF RHINOCEROS ON MY HANDS."

"You've got all these kids who say, 'I wear a cowboy hat but I listen to Eminem,' " drawls Big, adjusting his blouse in a frankly disturbing fashion. "And we're just reflecting that. In the middle of our set we'll stop and do Ludacris's 'I wanna li-li-lick you from your head to your toes. . . .' Then we'll just hold the microphone out to the audience and everyone joins in, screaming at the top of their lungs. Country people just want to have a big time!"

A bizarre vision? Yes. But not as bizarre as that of Big and Rich exiting the van and heading toward the gates of the zoo. In fact, Big's costume is even a little too far-out for Dawn Campos, our liaison at the zoo who politely asks that he put on a T-shirt under his costume. Big agrees.

However, as we enter the zoo, he alarms her further by asking if it would be possible to recreate the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's* — "but with animals." Mercifully, this plan is put on hold as we are introduced to Gertie, two tons of furious, teeth-baring white rhinoceros. Actually, make that two tons of mild-tempered and rather sweet white rhinoceros, who, as her keeper David Geurkink explains, is more than happy to have her leathery hide stroked by an oversize chicken putting his hand through the gate.

"They don't see too well," Geurkink says. "But they don't have to. They can deal with anything that comes their way."

Certainly, despite Gertie's apparent docility, it is reassuring to have a sturdy metal fence between her and us.

"Well, really, if she wanted to get out, she could," admits the handler. "They are very big animals. That's why you can't go in. Gertie wouldn't mean to hurt you, but if she got startled and moved the wrong way, you'd be red smear on the wall."

↑ Preparing to recreate the old "a chicken and a transvestite walk into a bar" joke.

Or a red-and-yellow smear in the case of Rich, who, profusely sweating in his costume, seems to have become mildly delirious.

"This is the future of country!" Rich exclaims. "We want to welcome everyone back to country. And what says 'Come back to country' more than a man in a chicken suit stroking a rhinoceros?"

What, indeed. But the time has come to say goodbye to Gertie and hello to the gift shop, where the pair spend the remainder of their cash on the emporium's entire supply of novelty toy monkeys, which they hand out to passing children. None of the kids know who their benefactors are, but they know a free cuddly simian when they see one, and our heroes are soon surrounded by a crowd of ankle-biters. Interestingly, while adults point at Rich, they seem oblivious to Big, presumably believing him to be a poorly dressed, pre-op transsexual.

"I think I still have the smell of rhinoceros on my hands," Big says, sniffing his fingers. "At least, I think it's rhinoceros. . . ."

Reluctantly, we leave this scene of monkey-waving mayhem and, while Big and Rich change out of their costumes, we drive off again for a debriefing session at a Mexican restaurant adjacent to the duo's hotel. It is here that *Blender* is introduced to Two Foot Fred, an old and very small friend of the band who introduces them to the crowd before they play, and Cowboy Troy.

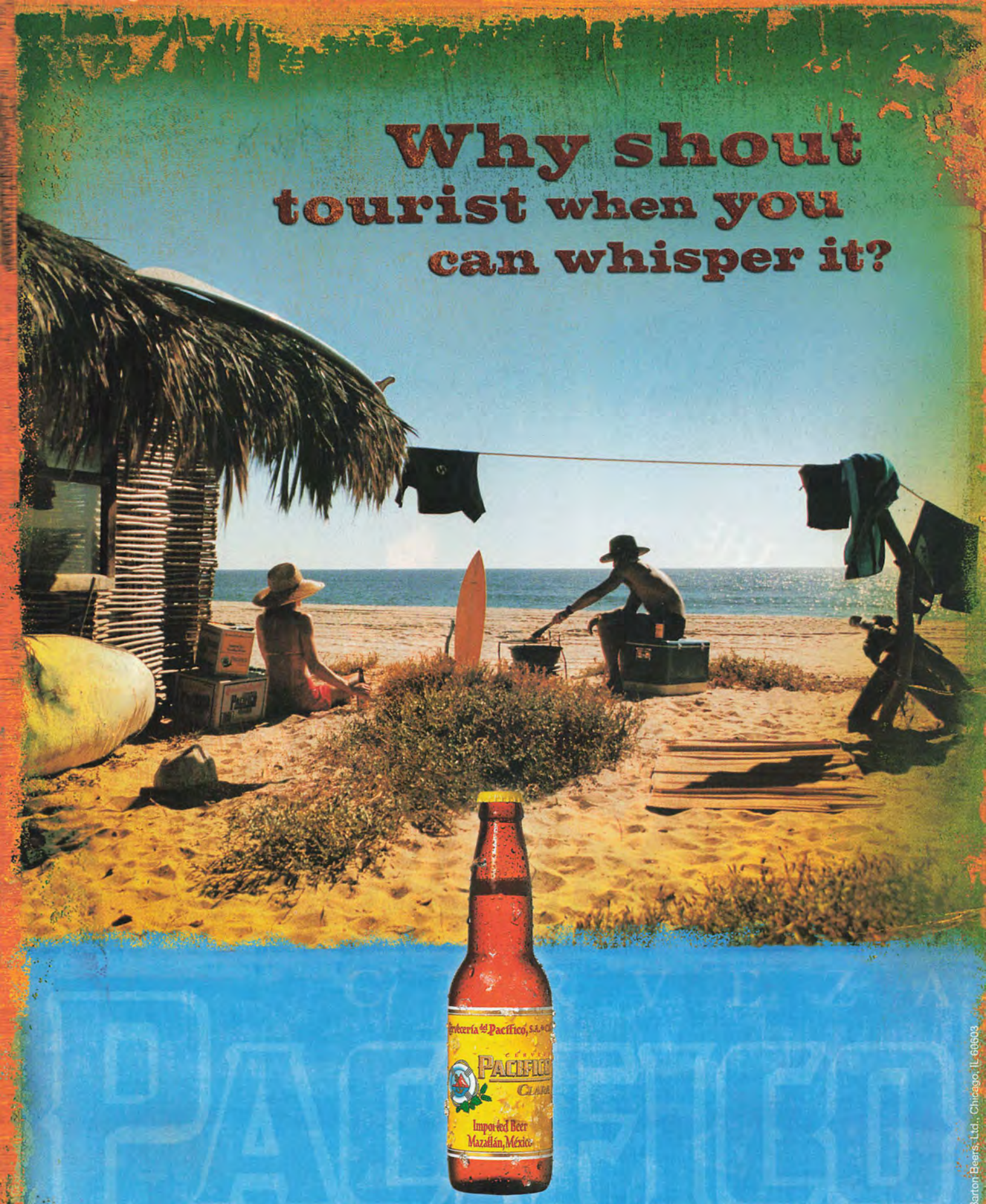
"My scooter's really been taking a beating on the road," Fred says, indicating his motorized ride. "A couple of shows back, it broke in half. Too many ladies hanging off it."

Meanwhile, Rich entertains himself by asking the bilingual Troy the Spanish words for fork ("*tenedor*"), spoon ("*cuchara*") and "Mommy, please tell the scary black man to stop" ("*Mami, dile al negro amenzate que me deje en paz*").

"That was a great day, just beautiful," Big enthuses, as he prepares to leave for that afternoon's soundcheck. "I like dressing up. That wasn't nothing. I'll do makeup — the whole nine yards. Every day ought to be dress-up. I want to be a kid for the rest of my life.

"It's a freak parade, man!" he concludes, in pitch-perfect preacher tones. "And it's gonna get a lot freakier if *we* have anything to do with it!" [BLENDER]

Why shout tourist when you can whisper it?



Mexico via Pacifico

Please drink responsibly.

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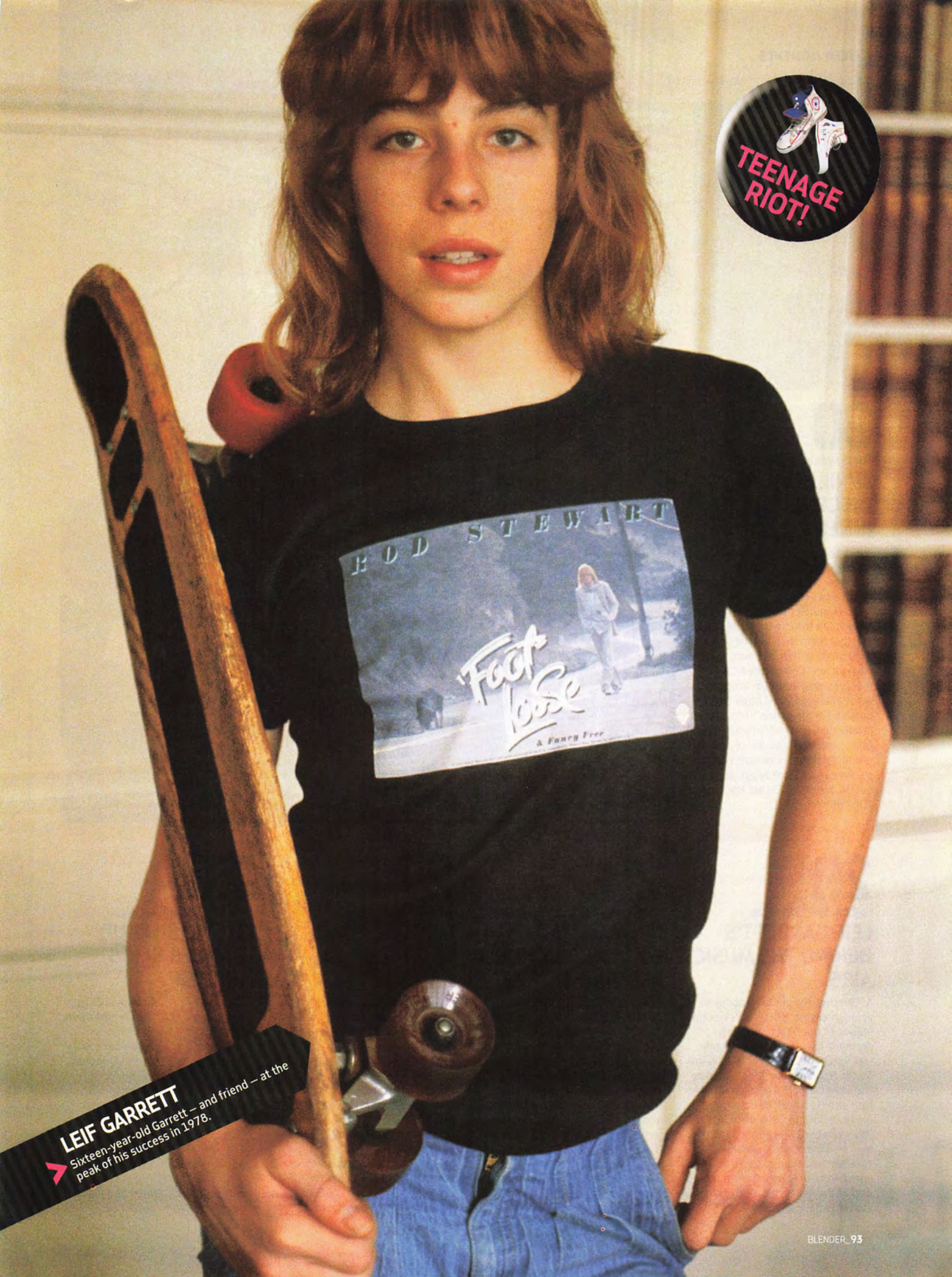
THE 50 GREATEST TEEN MOMENTS IN ROCK & ROLL HISTORY

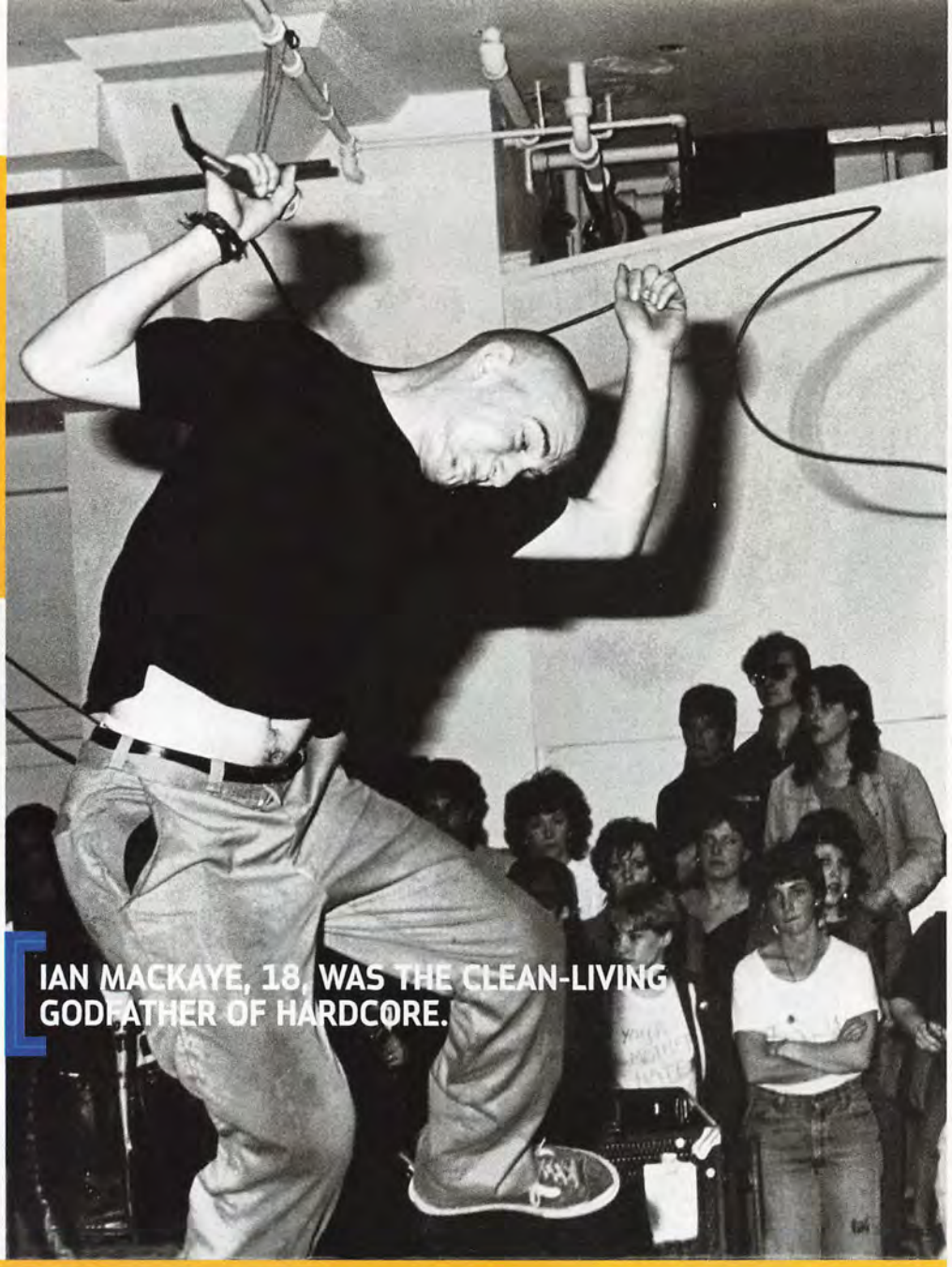
From Elvis to Britney, teenage pop stars have entertained, amused and, at times, disgusted us. *Blender* pays tribute to the musicians who were too young to vote, but just the right age to rock!

BY CLARK COLLIS, JOSH EELLS, ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM, MICHAEL ODELL, JONAH WEINER AND DOUGLAS WOLK



LEIF GARRETT
Sixteen-year-old Garrett – and friend – at the peak of his success in 1978.

Avril Lavigne: "Screw you, gravity!"



IAN MACKAYE, 18, WAS THE CLEAN-LIVING GODFATHER OF HARDCORE.

30

THE COMPLICATED LIFE

AVRIL LAVIGNE DISCOVERS HER INNER PUNK

Avril Lavigne started out as a strictly raised church girl from Napanee, Ontario. Signed at 16 to Arista as a possible "new Faith Hill," Lavigne met Scottish/American production trio the Matrix in 2001 and told them that, actually, she liked punk. Within 24 hours, the trio had written "Complicated," a mutant ballad-tantrum about an emotionally retarded boyfriend. Swathed in the Matrix's hook-laden production, Lavigne nailed it in two takes. The Matrix co-wrote and produced three more songs for her six-times-platinum debut album *Let Go*, including "SK8er Boi" and "I'm With You."

29

CAR CRASH TELEVISION

LEIF GARRETT'S *BEHIND THE MUSIC* AIRS

A "How Not To" guide for today's young pop stars, VH1's 1999 examination of the '70s teen icon's meteoric rise and calamitous fall was voted the best-ever *Behind the Music*. Particularly memorable was the singer's tearful reunion with his former best friend, now a paraplegic, following an incident in 1979 when a 17-year-old Garrett, high on alcohol and Quaaludes, crashed their ride. In an unfortunate choice of words, Garrett later said of the show, "It's all stepping stones to here and now."

28

NO SEX, NO DRUGS, YES ROCK & ROLL

IAN MACKAYE FOUNDS DISCHORD RECORDS

If not for this D.C. punk stalwart, most people would think the creed "Do It Yourself" meant watching Bob Vila for pointers on how to sand doorjambs. Clean-living godfather of the hardcore and straight-edge movements, 18-year-old MacKaye co-founded this landmark label in 1980 to release records by his band, Minor Threat. Twenty years later, Minor Threat get props in interviews with Green Day, while MacKeye's label set the template for making music outside the major-label machine.

27

DOOMED SOPRANO

FRANKIE LYMON RECORDS TRAGICALLY IRONIC 45

Frankie Lymon was already a dope-smoking Harlem pimp by the time, at 14, he recorded "I'm Not a Juvenile Delinquent" with his group, the Teenagers. The first black teen pop star, Lymon dressed in letter sweaters and sharply pressed slacks perfectly in line with the lyrics of this 1956 doo-wop classic: "It's easy to be good/It's hard to be bad/Stay out of trouble/And you will be glad." At 15, once his distinctive boy-soprano voice had broken, his career was in decline; by 25, he was dead of a heroin overdose.

26

ALL EYEZ ON MY PACKAGE

TUPAC SHAKUR DANCES IN HIS UNDIES

The artist not yet known as 2Pac was barely out of high school when he caught his first big break in 1990, landing a job as a backup dancer for funky Oakland rappers Digital Underground. Suddenly, Shakur, a sensitive teen who'd studied drama and ballet, was onstage in his underwear doing "The Humpty Dance" with a blowup doll. The less-than-glamorous gig would eventually pay off, paving the way for his own solo career and, ultimately, status as a hip-hop martyr.

Previous page: Jonathan Player/Rex Features; Joseph Cultice/Corbis Outline. This page, left to right: Kwaku Alston/Corbis Outline; courtesy of Southern Records

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25

Tommy Stinson (*top*) and Paul Westerberg on the hunt for spilled Schlitz.

EYEWITNESS

REPLACEMENTS PLAY THEIR FIRST GIG

As told to *Blender* by TOMMY STINSON, then 13-year-old 'Mats bassist and delinquent

When I was 11, I was about to go to jail. I'd been stealing bikes, mics from a church, stupid shit. My brother, [Replacements guitarist] Bob, found me messing with his bass and asked me if I wanted to learn. It really hurt, but he'd throw shit at me and force me to play. That was his way of reforming me. We started a band with no singer and played any song we could learn the first three notes to. The turning point came in June 1980, when I was 13 — our first show with Paul Westerberg. It was at an AA party; I don't remember whose mistake that was. But I got stuck in the hospital that night. A couple of days before, I got high, fell from a tree, and a picket fence went through my armpit. Two weeks later, I was back, playing in a sling, but I didn't have any big rock aspirations until I was about 15. That's when I had sex for the first time. Ah, groupies. . . ."

24

GO SHORTY!

ROXANNE SHANTÉ GETS HER "REVENGE"

Hip-hop's first feminist was a tiny 14-year-old named Lolita Shanté Gooden. Spurred by "Roxanne, Roxanne," U.T.F.O.'s hit ode to a snotty girl 'round the way, the Queens teen nicknamed herself Roxanne, teamed up with Marley Marl, and wrote a dis track in 1984 from the girl's perspective. She wound up launching a rap battle that dwarfs Jay-Z and Nas's beef: U.T.F.O. quickly retaliated, enlisting a girl named The Real Roxanne, and soon, MCs with no relation to either party piped up with increasingly bizarre versions ("Roxanne's Doctor," "Roxanne's a Man").

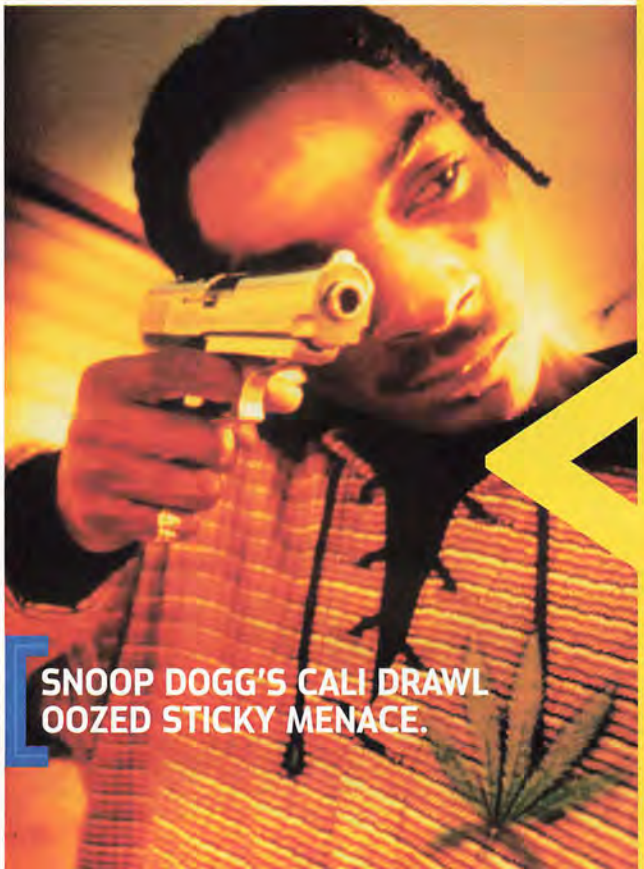
23

DIVA DEBUT

MARIAH MEETS MENTOR TOMMY MOTTOLA

At a November 1988 party, ambitious 18-year-old waitress and backup singer Mariah Carey got her demo into the hands of Columbia Records president Tommy Mottola. A smitten Mottola played the tape in his car on the way home, then returned to the party to find Carey. The Cinderella story continues with Mottola signing and falling in love with Carey before conjuring the biggest-selling artist of the '90s. Carey proves less skilful waving her own wand: In 2001, she launched her post-divorce album and film *Glitter*, and a late-night punchline was born.

The Jacksons ignore "Hot Asphalt" warning.



SNOOP DOGG'S CALI DRAWL OOZED STICKY MENACE.

22

TEENIZZLE SHIZZLE DIZZLE

SNOOP DOGG SLAGS COPS ON "DEEP COVER"

By 1992, *il capo di tutti* gangstas N.W.A had disintegrated and West Coast rap was on the wane. Not one to go out gently, N.W.A's Dr. Dre went solo and handpicked 19-year-old, Long Beach-bred Calvin Broadus, aka Snoop Doggy Dogg, as his protégé. Snoop, who'd spent three years in and out of prison for petty crimes, debuted like a pro, helping to ensure Cali hip-hop's staying power. His drawl oozed sticky menace as he pledged "187 on an undercover cop." You'd never guess *Starsky & Hutch* cameos were in his future.

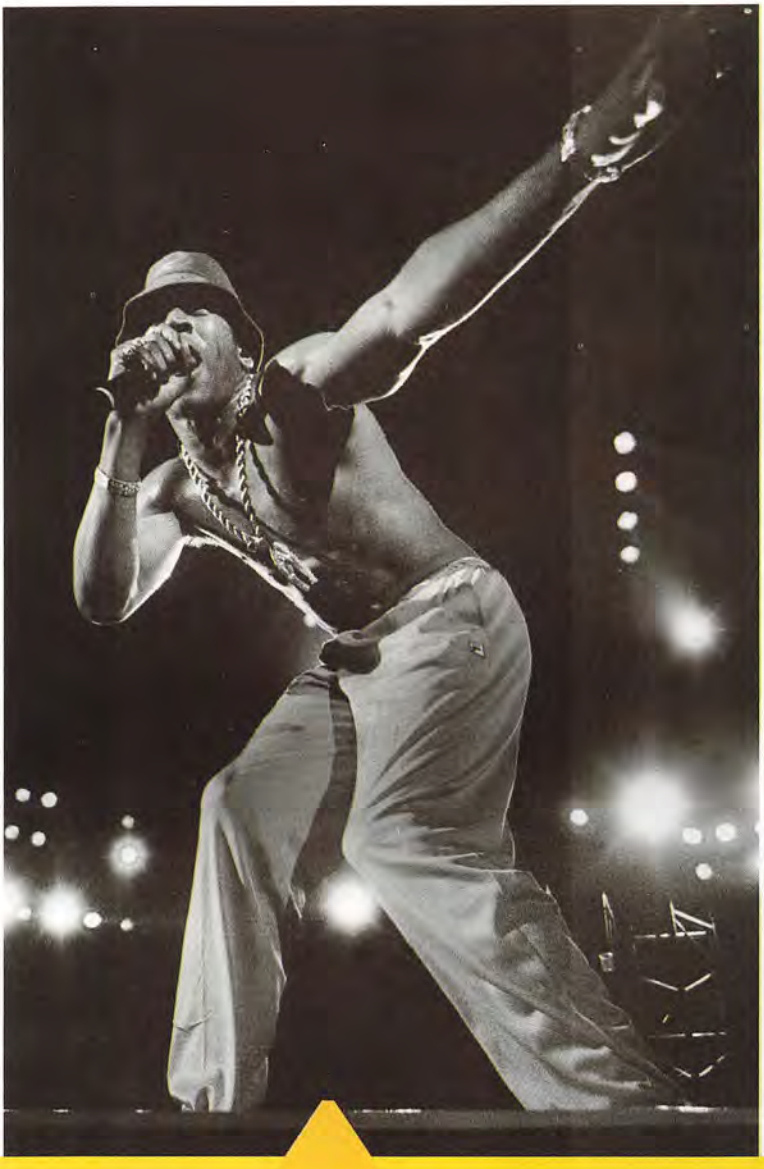
21

PRE-BONKERS!

JACKSON 5 HIT NO. 1 WITH "I WANT YOU BACK"

It's easy to forget, between shots of creepy Neverland kiddie lairs, that Michael Jackson was once an 11-year-old boy himself. In 1969, Jacko and siblings released their debut single for Motown, creating "bubblegum R&B" and zooming to the top of the pop charts (Jay-Z and Kanye West later sampled it on the smash "Izzo [H.O.V.A.]"). For the kids, it was a long way from working-class Gary, Indiana, where their stern steel-worker poppa raised them. For Motown, it was a fresh lease on life, renewing its claim to "The Sound of Young America."

Clockwise from top left: Michael Ochs Archive; Getty Images; A. Possin/LFI



MMC with Justin (center), Britney (front right) and "Losers"

20

SUPERSTAR SCHOOL

MICKEY MOUSE CLUB DREAM TEAM

Boasting a cast that, retrospectively, put the show's Annette Funicello-headed '50s-era line-up very much in the shade, the 1989–1994 *Mickey Mouse Club* actually boasted the teen talents of Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake, JC Chasez, Keri Russell and *The Notebook* star Ryan Gosling. Think of it as a tweener version of *Skull and Bones*. "Britney and Christina are sort of these love goddesses now," Gosling said in 2000. "But I did a [*Mickey Mouse Club*] sketch where Britney was a giant hamster and Christina was a giant cockatoo. So I just can't see them the way that the rest of the world does."

19

THE WUNDERKIND

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER EARNS "GENIUS" TAG

Shortly after Steveland Morris signed to Motown, label chief Berry Gordy rechristened the preteen with the comment, "That kid's a wonder!" But Little Stevie really proved it in 1963, when, just eight days after celebrating his 13th birthday, he recorded at a Detroit ballroom the joyously raucous live album *The 12 Year Old Genius*. Its success, together with that of its number 1 single "Fingertips (Pt.II)," helped establish Motown as a genuine pop label. Meanwhile, Stevie Wonder became the youngest-ever artist to make a Top 30 album, a record that he held onto until 1999. (Damn you, Charlotte Church!)

18

LADIES LOVE UNDERAGE RAPPERS

LL COOL J KICKS OFF DEF JAM RECORD LABEL

The record that launched rap's longest-running solo career – and its most important label – came courtesy of a cocky 16 year old with a rep for vicious battle rhyming. While hanging in Rick Rubin's dorm in 1984, Beastie Boy Adrock found a demo marked "LL Cool J" that had been recorded on equipment LL's grandpa bought him for his 13th birthday. He loved it. Seven hundred dollars later, Def Jam had its first 12-inch, which sold over 100,000 copies. "He used words you wouldn't expect," Adrock chuckles now. "Like 'anoint.' "

17

ROB THE CRADLE OF LOVE

R&B SINGER AALIYAH MARRIES R. KELLY

"She had something special before she even started singing," R. Kelly said of the first time he met Aaliyah Haughton, his protégée and, for a few months in 1994, his wife. Aaliyah was still attending high school in Detroit when her uncle, also Kelly's manager, introduced the two. By 15, Aaliyah had a Kelly-produced platinum debut and a soon-to-be-annulled marriage obtained in a secret ceremony. For her, it launched a brief but groundbreaking R&B career; for him, it launched what some might call a "pattern of behavior."

16

PORNY!

FIONA APPLE "EXPLOITS" HERSELF

When Fiona Apple confessed "I've been a bad, bad girl" at the beginning of 1997's "Criminal," she didn't know the half of it. The song's seedy video – set in a wood-paneled rec room reminiscent of a '70s porn set and featuring underfed models in their unmentionables – renewed debate over teenage sexuality. Apple's past as a 12-year-old rape victim only fanned the flames, but the strong-willed songstress refused to back down. "I decided if I was going to be exploited," she explained, "then I would do the exploiting myself."

15

MASTER OF THE MP3

COLLEGE BOY SHAWN FANNING INVENTS NAPSTER

Some things you expect to find in a boy's dorm room: *Reservoir Dogs* posters, Nietzsche paperbacks, suspiciously balled-up Kleenex. In 1999, though, this 19-year-old Northeastern U. techie added "record-company scourge" to the list. Fanning wrote a brilliantly simple file-sharing program, sparking a nationwide explosion of free music and a *Time* magazine cover. By February 2001, Napster boasted 80 million users trading three billion files a month, but panicked litigation soon forced it to become an industry-sanctioned pay site.

Left to right: Urban Images; Getty Images

GIRLIE ACTION!

14 THE RUNAWAYS RECORD "CHERRY BOMB"

How did a bunch of unknown teen rockettes produce the ultimate "bad girl" anthem? With a little help from a svengali twice their age . . . and some fishnet stockings.

BY DOUGLAS WOLK

The Runaways, from left: Lita Ford, Cherie Currie, Jackie Fox, Joan Jett and Sandy West

ONE DAY IN late 1975, a striking 15 year old named Marie Currie was hanging out with her twin sister, Cherie, at the Sugar Shack, an underage disco in North Hollywood where teenagers would drink soda and dance. A sketchy, flashily dressed man twice their age sidled up to Marie and asked if she wanted to audition for the Runaways, the band he said he "directed." Marie promptly told him where he could stick it.

But when he and the leather-jacketed teenage girl at his side made Cherie the same offer, she jumped at it. She recognized the older man as pop svengali Kim Fowley and the bad-ass chick as 17-year-old guitarist Joan Jett. "I kinda felt starstruck by Joan," Cherie says. "It was exciting. When you're 15 years old, just about anything gets you excited."

By the time the strange duo had approached her that afternoon, Cherie had heard a lot about the Runaways, the tough, punky, all-girl teen band that had played only a few times but had already built a substantial buzz. They would go on to become what was arguably the first American riot-grrrl band. In their five-year existence, they'd tour the world and launch the careers of Jett, Cherie Currie, Lita Ford and the Bangles' Micki Steele, who left around the time Currie joined. But first, they would have to find something they could all play.

The Runaways met Currie at their occasional lyricist Kari Krome's house, where they set up in the garage. But Currie hadn't really sung before, and at first, things didn't go smoothly. "I'd been asked to learn a Suzi Quatro song to audition with," Currie says. "Coming from my Dean-Martin-loving background, I picked 'Fever,' and none of the girls knew that song."

Currie suggested playing Barry Manilow songs, which, "were certainly not within my realm of musical knowledge," Jett says today with a laugh. Still, they were determined to find common ground.

"Cherie liked some of the same singers I did — Bowie, British glitter music — and we were excited about her singing with us," Jett says. So Jett and Fowley decided to write a song on the spot for Currie.

"They excused themselves and went into the living room with the other girls, and I found myself sitting alone in the garage," Currie remembers.

"We named it 'Cherry Bomb,' after Cherie," Jett says. "It's a song about a bad girl; not a mean girl, but a girl who breaks the rules of what girls are allowed to do, which is a perfect description of what the Runaways were."

Drummer Sandy West sat on the floor and watched as "Cherry Bomb" took shape. "Kim's normal way of writing a song was that he would hover over us and point his hand," West says. "And he would shout out some sounds that were supposed to represent a melody or chords. Then he would shout out the lyrics. Joan, who, at 17, was a natural-born rocker and musician, would translate what he was trying to say, and a great rock & roll song was born."

Jett came back out to the garage and sang "Cherry Bomb" to Currie. Next, they all played it together. "After I finished," Currie says, "they all went into Kari's house while I sat there sweating, thinking, 'They are never going to hire me for this band — ever.' Then they came back out, and Kim put out his hand to me and said, 'Congratulations.' "

But the final element of "Cherry Bomb" didn't appear for another few months. The first few times they played it in public, Currie wore jeans and a T-shirt with the Runaways' name, like the rest of the band. Inspired by David Bowie's costume changes from his Diamond Dogs tour, though, she'd been itching to slip into something more glamorous.

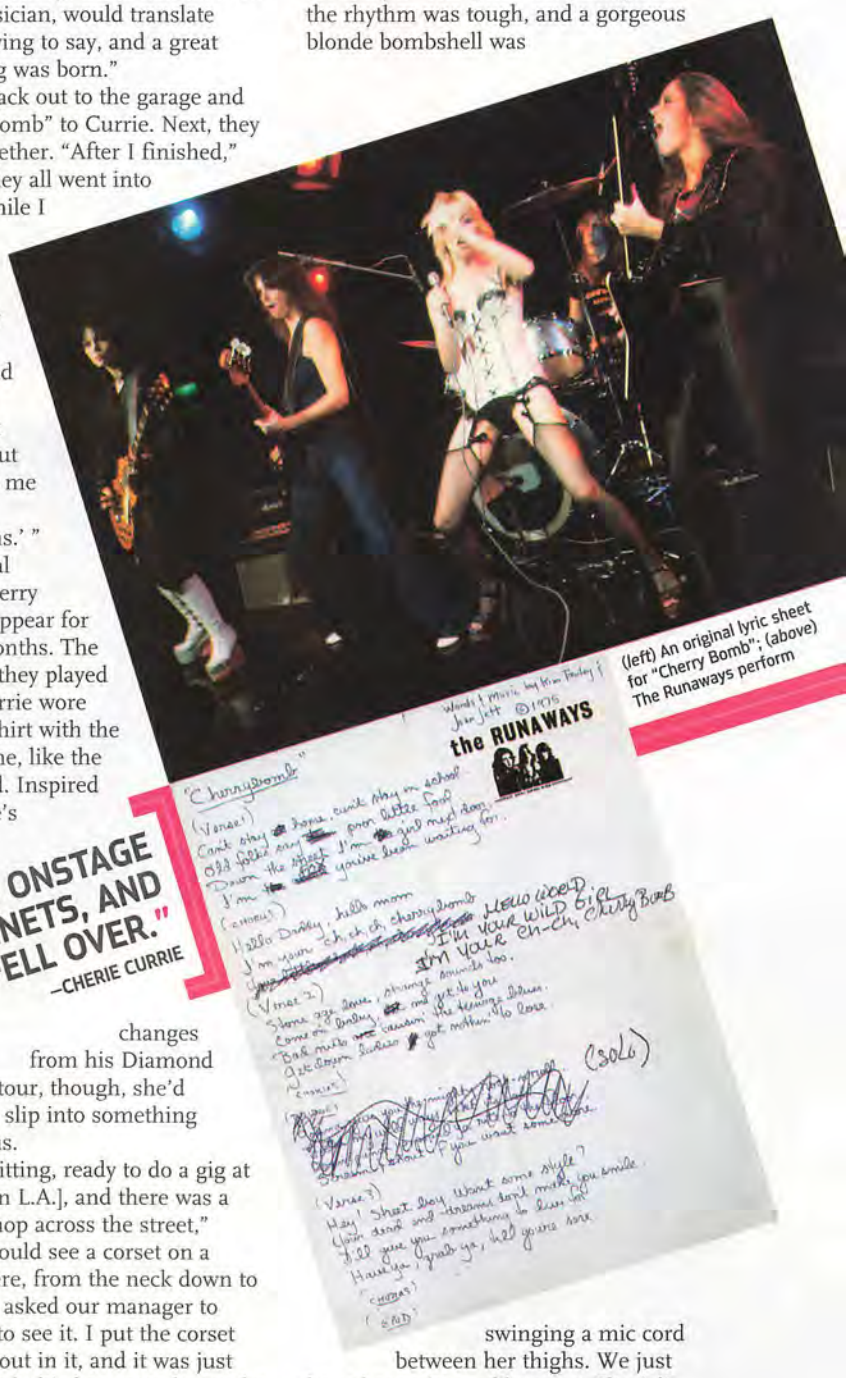
"I WALKED ONSTAGE IN FISHNETS, AND PEOPLE FELL OVER."
–CHERIE CURRIE

"We were sitting, ready to do a gig at the Starwood [in L.A.], and there was a little lingerie shop across the street," Curie says. "I could see a corset on a mannequin there, from the neck down to the knee, and I asked our manager to come with me to see it. I put the corset on and walked out in it, and it was just like, 'Oh my God, this has *got* to be,' so he bought it for me.

"Kim came to meet me, and I told him, 'I think this is going to take "Cherry Bomb" places.' I put it on with the high heels and the fishnet stockings, and Kim said, 'It's a done deal. You have to wear this for that song.' I'd walk out onstage in that outfit, 16 years old with my Bowie haircut, and people fell over."

Released as their debut single, "Cherry Bomb" was never quite a chart hit, but it nonetheless became a proto-punk standard, especially overseas. "The crowds in Europe and Japan went nuts," West says. "The lyrics were dangerous, the rhythm was tough, and a gorgeous blonde bombshell was swinging a mic cord between her thighs. We just hoped security could protect Cherie!"

To this day, the ex-Runaways still love "Cherry Bomb." Jett even re-recorded it for her 1999 album *Fetish*. "I still perform that song all the time," Currie says. "It's like an old friend, something you're always sure of."



(left) An original lyric sheet for "Cherry Bomb"; (above) The Runaways perform

Opposite page: LFt; This page, top to bottom: LFt; Alphonse Telymonde

13

EYEWITNESS

HANSON START A RIOT IN INDONESIA

As told to *Blender* by **TAYLOR HANSON**, then 14-year-old sex symbol of the "MMMBop" trio

"We were playing the Hard Rock Café in Jakarta in the summer of '97, and the audience was insane. About 3,000 people had been shut out, and they started hammering down the doors, throwing rocks, smashing the windows. Someone told us, 'You need to leave,' so we bolted off the stage. All these girls were hurling their bodies across tables, so we ran through the kitchen, where the cook stopped us for an autograph! When we got outside, our van was surrounded by 5,000 people; we had to battle our way through. It was so intense: Hands pulling at hair, skin. . . . We finally got inside, but the crowd started pounding the van, rocking it like a toy. We were barely able to force our way out. We weren't into groupies, but you can't ignore that kind of reaction from the opposite sex. What guy wouldn't be excited by tons of screaming girls?"

The Who: "No wonder the practice space was so cheap!"

The Beastie Boys: "Are we missing someone?"

12

WEIRDEST LINEUP EVER!

THE BEASTIE BOYS OPEN FOR MADONNA

The Beasties, including a 19-year-old Adrock, were unwisely signed up as support on Madonna's Summer 1985 Like a Virgin tour, and every night assailed confused 15-year-old girls and their parents with pre-*Licensed to Ill* baying and beer-throwing. It climaxed with a show at New York's Madison Square Garden in front of 20,000 Madonna wannabes, whose boos were so deafening MCA leapt on a speaker stack, grabbed his crotch and shouted obscenities at the audience. "I expected lightning to come down and strike him dead," Def Jam publicist Bill Adler later said.

11

B-BOY BREAKTHROUGH

BRONX KID INVENTS SCRATCHING—BY ACCIDENT!

Forget the Heineken commercial where a DJ invents scratching by spilling beer on turntables. The real honor goes to the Bronx's "Grand Wizard" Theodore Livingston, who, at 13, used to stand on milk crates to reach his Technics. He was practicing in the summer of 1975 when his mom yelled, "Turn it down!" Using a finger to stay the record, he made the needle rub across the vinyl. Intrigued, he worked rhythm and pitch into the technique, creating one of hip-hop's most iconic sounds. Afrika Bambaataa recalls, "That's when the whole movement started changing."

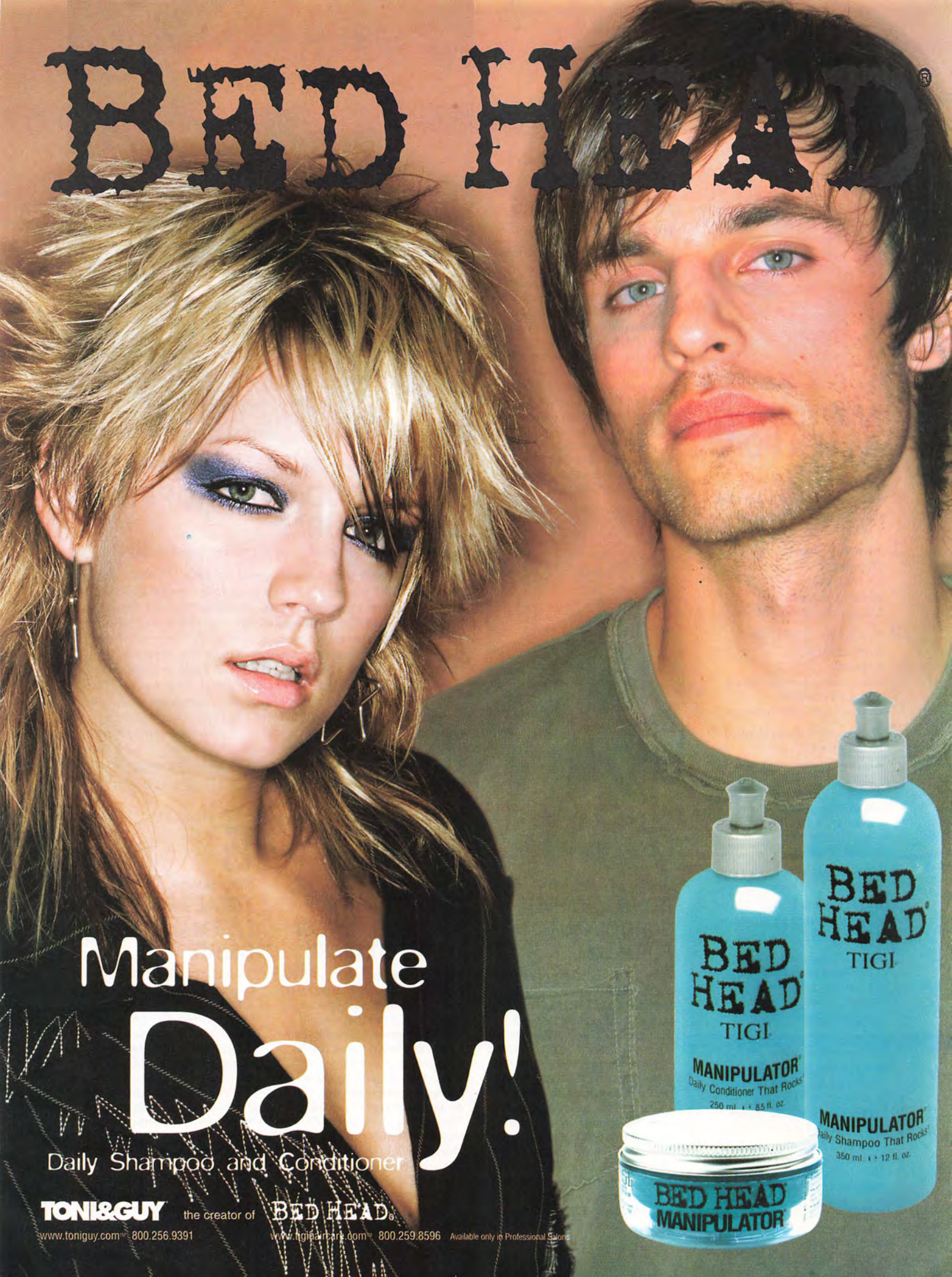
10

MANIMAL!

A TEENAGE KEITH MOON JOINS THE WHO

The Who were playing in a West London pub in 1964 when a drunken kid emerged from the audience to tell the band that his friend was a better drummer than the one they had playing with them at the time. Invited up to prove it, 16-year-old Keith Moon played "Road Runner" perfectly all the way through — and with such astonishing force that he broke the kit. Afterward, singer Roger Daltrey told Moon to show up to the band's next gig the following week. "Nobody ever said, 'You're in,' " Moon would say later. "They just said, 'What're you doing Monday?'"

Clockwise from top left: David LaChappelle/Corbis Outline; LFI (2)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1 What do you want for Christmas?
- A A lovely pony
- B Singing lessons
- C Bigger breast implants

2 How did you spend your summer break?
- A At camp
- B In a recording studio making your debut album
- C In court suing your momager

3 What's your favorite thing to do at the mall?
- A Look at sneakers and, like, stuff
- B Perform a 20-minute set, sign autographs, ignore leering gazes from guys old enough to be your grandfather
- C Score crank

4 What did you do on your 14th birthday?
- A Hung out with friends
- B Recorded single for Disney
- C Got married

5 What are you reading now?
- A The latest *Harry Potter* book
- B A seventeen-page tour itinerary
- C *Dr. Phil's Guide to Rehab*

IF YOU ANSWERED . . .

MOSTLY A: Hooray! You're just a normal kid. But you ain't gettin' a pony for Christmas.

MOSTLY B: Hooray! You're a pop star at the start of your career!

MOSTLY C: Boo! You're a teen pop star at the end of your career. Don't let the door hit your butt implants on the way out!

9

TEEN POP GOES "CHA-CHING"

'N SYNC SELL A MILLION ALBUMS IN A DAY

On their 1998 debut and the following Christmas album, 'N Sync looked like they'd guaranteed career shortevity as Backstreet Boys clones. By 2000, they had split with svengali Lou Pearlman, switched record labels and perfected a pop-R&B hybrid they called "dirty pop." Their third album, *No Strings Attached*, was the result: It sold 1.1 million on its first day, and by week's end, it had shifted 2.4 million copies, still the record for most records sold in a week. "Whoa!" was the official reaction from then 19-year-old singer Justin Timberlake.

'N Sync: Which is the hot one, again?

Tiffany follows her "mall tour" with her "outer-space tour."

8

EYEWITNESS

TIFFANY EMBARKS ON "THE GOOD LIFE SHOPPING MALL TOUR"

As told to *Blender* by 2002 *Playboy* covergirl TIFFANY DARWISH

"MCA didn't know how to promote me: I was 15 and too young to play clubs. By 1987, I was going to be dropped. Then my A&R man was at a mall and he thought, 'Why can't she just perform here?' At first, people would just carry on shopping when I sang. I had a lot of people come up and yell at me. There were times I did cry, because people were *mean*! Then radio started playing 'I Think We're Alone Now' and there'd be 3,000, 4,000 or 6,000 people. That's when we had to move into other venues, because you found people getting hurt. I was kind of shocked to see Avril Lavigne playing malls, because I did it to break into the market, and she's pretty much established. I know a lot of other up-and-comers have tried it, and it hasn't been so successful. I think it was the right place at the right time. And no, I never feel like bursting into song when I go into a mall."

7

LUNCHROOM LEGENDS

BONO AND HIGH SCHOOL PALS FORM U2

In the fall of 1976, Larrry Mullen Jr. was 14 and bashing a drum kit given to him by his sister. A bulletin-board appeal for band members at Dublin's Mount Temple high school brought six teens to the family residence at 60 Rosemount Avenue: Paul Hewson (later Bono), the Evans bothers Dave (later the Edge) and Dick, Adam Clayton, Peter Martin and Ivan McCormick. Minus Martin and McCormick, they formed The Feedback, a Stones-and-Beatles covers band, and later, U2. Edge's brother Dick quickly sensed these no-hopers were wasting his time and joined the Virgin Prunes.

6

THE ARCHITECT

CHUCK BERRY RECORDS "SWEET LITTLE SIXTEEN"

Uncle Chuck didn't just invent Rock & Roll. With songs like "School Day" and this ode to adoring fans, he also helped define that nascent '50s phenomenon called the Teenager. And though a conviction for transporting an underage girl across state lines for "immoral purposes" a few years later derailed his career and made "Sweet Little Sixteen" sound a little less sweet ("She's got the grownup blues/Tight dresses and lipstick/She's sportin' high-heel shoes"), Berry's 1958 classic is still the definitive portrait of the post-pubescent American female.

5

THE DALY SHOW

TOTAL REQUEST LIVE MAKES ITS DEBUT

It was a childishly simple idea: Combine the call-in voting of MTV's *Total Request* with the celebrity interviews and after-school time slot of *MTV Live* and hand the microphone to a VJ so white-bred he made Kurt Loder look cool. But the result, christened — guess what?! — *Total Request Live*, did more than just grab big ratings. From the first day, when the Backstreet Boys' "I'll Never Break Your Heart" topped the countdown, it played a major role in fueling the teen-pop explosion of the late 1990s. On the other hand, it also led to *Last Call With Carson Daly*.

Clockwise from top left: Gary Ham (illustration); Redferns/Retna Ltd.; Michael Lewis/Corbis Outline

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Britney: "*Very* excited" about math class

3

SWEET LITTLE 16!

BRITNEY SPEARS MAKES DEBUT VIDEO

At age 10, Britney Spears appeared as a possessed demon child in the off-Broadway production *Ruthless*. A year later, she successfully auditioned to be a Mouseketeer on *The Mickey Mouse Club*. In 1999, she combined her talents for playing angels and devils in the video for her first single "Hit Me Baby (One More Time)." Spears raunched down a high-school corridor in school-girl miniskirt, bare midriff and pigtails. "I don't want to be part of someone's Lolita thing," commented the 16 year old. The world wasn't so sure. The debut single and album achieved a unique feat: simultaneous number 1s.

2

KING MAKER

ELVIS PRESLEY RECORDS "THAT'S ALL RIGHT"

When guitarist Scotty Moore first jammed with 19-year-old truck driver Elvis Presley on July 4, 1954, he was unimpressed with his ordinary voice and "science fiction" name. But the next day they entered the studio of Sun Records chief Sam Phillips where – after some abortive balladeering – Presley launched into a scorching, and chart-bound version of the old blues track "That's All Right." History – and a mountain of fried peanut butter-and-banana sandwiches – beckoned.

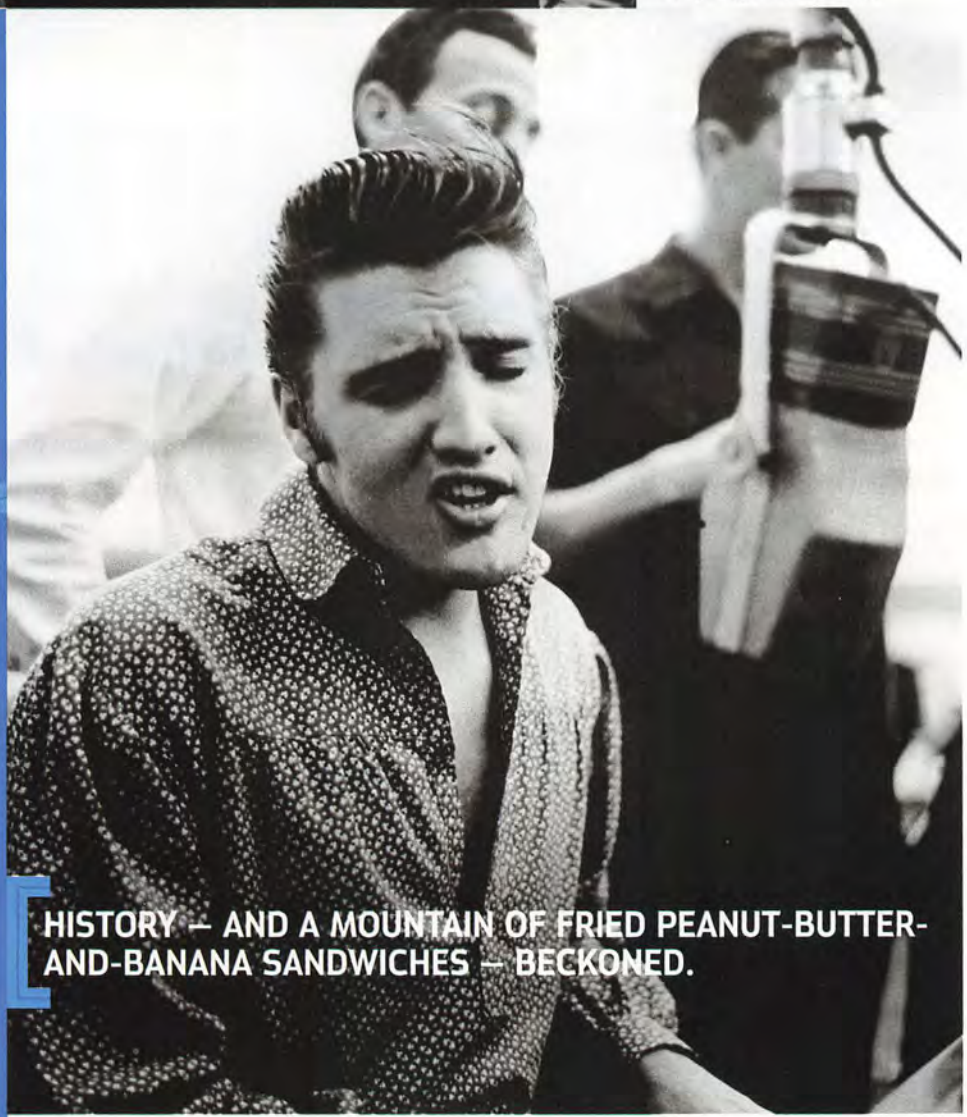
"This one's for all the ladies in the house!"

4

PRETTY VACANT

JOHN LYDON AUDITIONS FOR THE SEX PISTOLS

In the mid '70s, entrepreneur Malcolm McLaren was the anti-Simon Cowell, holding impromptu auditions in his London clothing shop for a foul-mouthed no-talent to front a new band. Inspired by the New York Dolls, whom he had briefly managed, his and partner Vivienne Westwood's Sex boutique attracted a free-thinking clientele – among them John Lydon, a surly 19 year old with bad teeth (hence "Rotten"), green hair and a wild stare (a legacy of childhood meningitis). By way of audition Lydon sang Alice Cooper's "Eighteen" along to the shop's jukebox. He passed, and the face of punk's anti-everything ethos was born.



HISTORY – AND A MOUNTAIN OF FRIED PEANUT-BUTTER-AND-BANANA SANDWICHES – BECKONED.

Top to bottom, left: Mick Rock; Gilloon/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.

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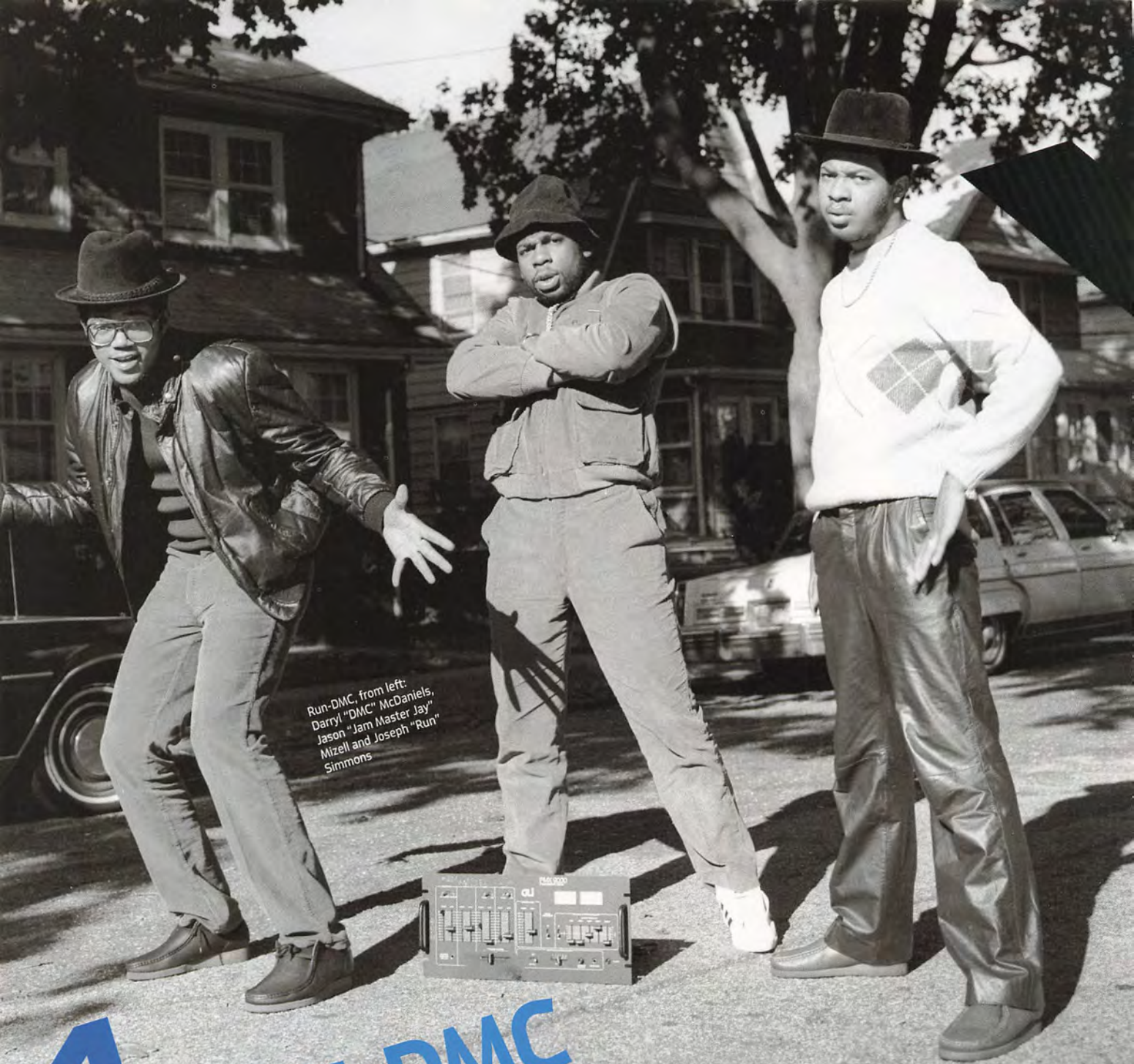

Run-DMC, from left: Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, Jason "Jam Master Jay" Mizell and Joseph "Run" Simmons

1 RUN-DMC RECORD "IT'S LIKE THAT / SUCKER MCS"

BY JONAH WEINER

In 1983, the only thing that could stop Joseph "Run" Simmons and Darryl "DMC" McDaniels from inventing hip-hop as we know it was . . . getting grounded!

WHEN 19-YEAR-OLD Darryl McDaniels snuck out of his house in Hollis, Queens, one evening in 1983, he was petrified that his overprotective mother would catch him. Outside, he met up with his pal Joseph Simmons, and the two headed over to the nearby neighborhood of Jamaica — and local musician Larry Smith's attic.

The room doubled as a recording studio: "There was no furniture, no chairs, just equipment," McDaniels recalls. "We just sat on the floor doing rhymes." In a few hours, McDaniels and Simmons had recorded two thundering hip-hop tracks — "It's Like That" and "Sucker MCs" — and Simmons's older brother Russell had given them a name: Run-DMC. "We hated it," McDaniels says, grinning. "We wanted to be the Dynamic Two, the Treacherous Two — when we heard *that* shit, we was like, 'We're gonna be ruined!' "

McDaniels — the newly rechristened DMC — crept back into his bedroom undetected from his first recording session at 1 in the morning: "I didn't even tell my parents I was going," he says. "My mom woulda kicked my ass!"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

IN 1977, THE future Run and DMC couldn't have dreamed they were six years away from changing music history forever. Two junior-high schoolers from a middle-class black neighborhood, they had more immediate concerns: parents and bullies. "I was a quiet, straight-A student," McDaniels says with a chuckle, "the last person you'd think would be a rapper."

"I WAS A QUIET, STRAIGHT-A STUDENT. THE LAST PERSON YOU'D THINK WOULD BE A RAPPER." —DMC

Then just 13, Joseph Simmons was already DJing for Kurtis Blow, a rising rap star who was managed by Russell — but this only attracted trouble. "Joe used to get teased," McDaniels says. "Kids called him 'DJ Bum' and 'white boy' because he had curly hair and he was frail."

Emboldened by Olde English malt liquor and "trey bags" of weed, the two would retreat to Simmons's attic, creating a private world where shakedown artists and nagging moms had no sway. Spinning secondhand records, they'd rap for hours to an invisible crowd. "I was a mild-mannered student by day, but at night I'd transform into DMC, King of Rock, Microphone Master!" McDaniels says, beaming. "Reefer was priority number one," Simmons adds. "Rhyming was number two." They hollered aggressive, cocky rhymes, a wild contrast to their outward demeanor. "My parents didn't hear none of the 'beat-yo-brother-down-to-the-ground' rhymes," McDaniels says.

Soon enough, though, their talents outgrew the attic. "We wanted to be heard," Simmons says.

By the late '70s, hip-hop had spread throughout New York. Thousands of kids would pile into parks and schoolyards for impromptu parties where, on any given night, sweaty crowds could watch such pioneer DJs as Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash wreaking hell on their vinyl collections; power for the sound systems came free, jacked from hotwired streetlamps. In those days, park parties ran until neighbors — or gunfire — summoned the cops.

"Two-fifth," a Hollis schoolyard on 205th Street, was Queens's hip-hop epicenter. "Kids came from Jamaica, where LL Cool J lived, and from Southside, where 50 Cent is from," McDaniels remembers. "That's where I first saw Jam Master Jay." In 1979, Jason Mizell was 14 and already Hollis's number 1 DJ. While Jay was spinning, worthy local MCs could rhyme; Simmons and McDaniels were among them. "To be with Jay was an honor," Simmons recalls. "I was souped up," McDaniels adds. "After I rhymed, all the girls would say, 'D, come over here. . . ' " After an hour or so, he'd rush to 197th Street to make curfew.

Nobody thought rap was something you made money at, though, and in 1982, all three started college. Simmons described the situation without much optimism in 1987: "I thought I was gonna get a job at Woolworth's. . . . Come home, do my little homework and not know what the fuck I'm gonna do."

When Russell Simmons — whose guidance had led Kurtis Blow to the 1980 hit "The Breaks" — offered his brother and McDaniels the chance to make a record, they were ecstatic. Joe Simmons struck on an idea inspired by Grandmaster Flash's ghetto dispatch "The Message" and frustration over his own prospects. "Joe said, 'Just write about how it is in the world,' " McDaniels recalls of the concept behind "It's Like That."

The track turned rhymes about homelessness and wage slaves into adhesive hooks. "It moved people on the dance floor, yet said something," Chuck D, Public Enemy's frontman, says.

THE GREATEST TEEN MOMENT EVER!

Rocketing on a spare platform of horn stabs, firecracker claps and programmed drums, "It's Like That" and its B-side, "Sucker MCs," sounded like nothing that had come before.

Whereas Kurtis Blow and Sugarhill Gang hits featured lilting R&B influences, Run-DMC's raw, avant-garde sound was rock without a trace of guitar: It was stripped-down, youthfully brash and ungodly loud. On "Sucker MCs," Run-DMC introduced ego to hip-hop, shouting-out Cadillacs, champagne and caviar while insulting competitors. "Sucker MCs" was the first bling-bling track, and the first battle track, too. Tucked within its percussive assault is the Neptunes' hard-edged, booming DNA.

"We spent 12 hours on the drum sounds," Russell Simmons explains. "When we finished, everybody was like, 'What are we gonna do tomorrow?' I was like, 'Nothing. It's finished.' "

The single broke big, selling up to 20,000 copies weekly for an eventual total of 250,000. "We had to drop out of school and tour," McDaniels says.

He and Simmons agreed on Jay for their DJ: "Not only was he the best, but he rolled with the gun-toting Hollis Crew," McDaniels says, chuckling. "Motherfuckers wouldn't rob us!"

By 1986, Run-DMC's insistence on authenticity had struck a global chord: They were the first rap group to ever go platinum, signaling hip-hop's commercial longevity and establishing the model for any rapper who has ever said the words "Keep it real."

"We never thought we'd be successful," Russell Simmons says with a laugh. "We thought we were doing something unique to us and our friends. Turns out the world was ready." [BLENDER]

Janette Beckman/Retna Ltd.

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The Clash

The smash album that turned London punks from cult stars into rock gods — remastered, expanded and reviewed. p136

Clockwise from top left: Sarah A. Friedman/Corbis Outline; courtesy of Astralwerks; Tim Jackson; Pennie Smith

On the Couch

On R. Kelly's double album, split personalities do battle

R. KELLY
HAPPY PEOPLE/U SAVED ME
✪✪✪
JIVE

"WELCOME TO THE greatest show on earth," R. Kelly croons on his new album. "Welcome to my bedroom, baby."

Coming from a man whose bedroom is under legal scrutiny, this line is neither funny nor sleazy — it's unsettling. Yet some might argue that such judgments are unfair. Maybe we ought to separate Kelly the man (battling multiple counts of child pornography charges, to say nothing of the merciless urination-themed parodies on *Chappelle's Show*) from Kelly the *music* man, one of the industry's most inspired producers, a singer whose smoother-than-silk voice rivals that of Marvin Gaye or Stevie Wonder.

KELLY LADLES HIMSELF IN EXCESS.

Kelly's albums, though, tempt listeners to treat him as a district attorney might. Increasingly, his music isn't just self-referential but self-*obsessed* in an unabashedly exaggerated fashion.

It's tough to detach artist from art when song titles alone suggest a psychiatric diagnosis: acute narcissism ("The World's Greatest," his contribution to the film *Ali*) accompanied by delusions of grandeur (1996's positivity anthem "I Believe I Can Fly"). Kelly has a passion for extremes: Songs are either sacred or profane, by which we mean *really* sacred (Jesus-praising, church choir-laden) or *really* profane ("Feelin' On Yo Booty" is not about the Lord). And he ladles himself in excess: He'll serve up not just a remix, but a re-remix, not "Sex Me," but "Sex Me, Parts I & II."

And now, not just an album, a double album. *Happy People/U Saved Me* is — *à la* OutKast's *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* and Nelly's *Sweat* and *Suit* — a display of versatility. It also severs Kelly's personas: The first CD is exclusively dedicated to classy dance instructionals; the second, gospel-themed inspirational tunes. While countless R&B artists, from Ray Charles to Gaye to Prince, have flip-flopped between flesh and spirit, only Kelly has followed the flesh into so much personal and public trouble. He's like St. Augustine reborn as an R&B singer, staging heartfelt musical tugs-of-war between body and soul.

Here, that struggle is the most chaste it's ever been. With his trial nearing, Kelly's foregone bumps 'n' grinds for parent-friendly jams; *Happy People* is his most buttoned-up take on body movin' yet.

The disc is infatuated with steppin', a Chicagoan dance routine resembling a slow-mo jitterbug. Kelly celebrated the trend on his 2003 *Chocolate Factory* single "Step In the Name of Love"; he celebrates it again on this set's first single, "Happy People," which has a catchy groove but sounds almost exactly like "Step." According to Kelly, "Steppin' is therapy,

R. KELLY'S DIRTIEST MOMENTS

Four horny songs, recorded before he sought redemption

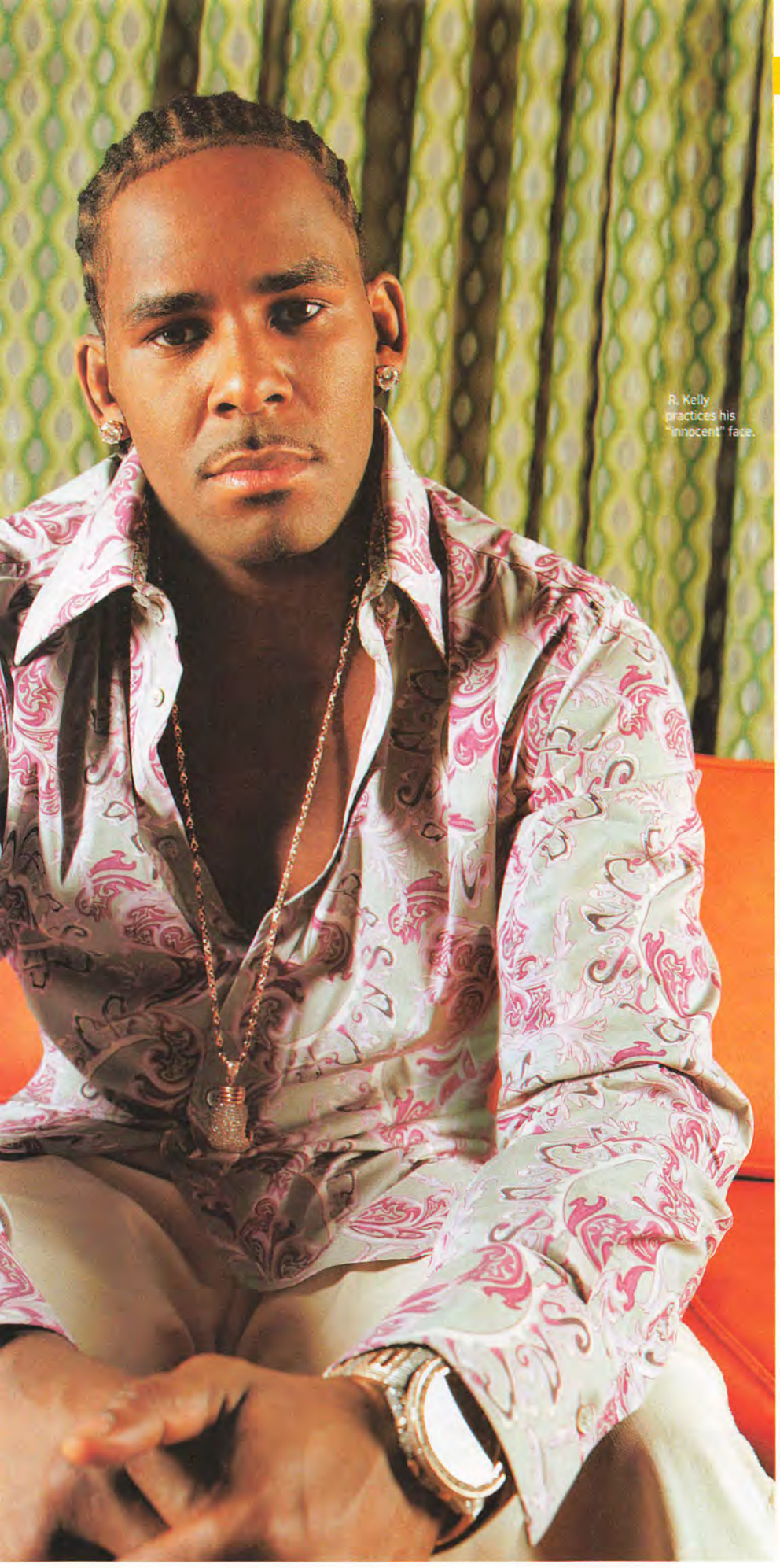
"I LIKE THE CROTCH ON YOU"
12 PLAY, *1993*
"The time has come for you and I to knock it," Kelly informs a girl. Over lecherous New Jack Swing, this is a come-on stripped of sensuality and subtlety with a lawyer-friendly caveat: "Only if you're old enough, baby. . . ."

"TP-2"
TP-2.COM, *2000*
Kelly makes no bones about boning: "Hit it hard from the back" is the first thing out of his mouth. Panties are the next thing *in*, as he vows to remove the girl's "Secrets" with his teeth. He ends with a command to "set it on my face."

"HEAVEN I NEED A HUG"
(UNRELEASED) *2002*
Recorded right after the child-porn scandal broke, this plea for public support is undercut by the refrain "Shower down on me, wet me with your love." Top of the list of things *not* to say when you stand accused of urinating on a minor.

"THOIA THOING"
THE R. IN R&B COLLECTION, VOL. 1, *2003*
After a thousand descriptions of hitting it raw, it's no small feat that he can still take a snapshot this jarring: "I'm butt-naked: sweat socks and house shoes." Bizarre, horny, comical, abject — all in seven words.

Reisig & Taylor



R. Kelly practices his "innocent" face.

healing both you and me." So, throughout the disc, he has us steppin' in the name of love, steppin' into heaven, steppin' our way to happiness and, hey, maybe even world peace.

He's also steppin' into monotony. With nearly every track built on 8-count beats, *Happy* is little more than an extended dance lesson. Add lyrics awash in generic self-help ("Somebody touch somebody/ Tell somebody you love somebody") and only standout tracks like "If I Could Make the World Dance," with its vocal layers sweetly bouncing off one another, step out from the pack.

Disc two, *U Saved Me*, is similarly single-minded, with prayer as the theme and salvation as the goal. Jesus, a popular homeboy whom rappers like Kanye West and Mase have publicly befriended, is omnipresent. So is the stuff of *American Idol* singles: lyrics about peaks, valleys and soaring eagles.

As a genre that knows no understatement, gospel can be ideal for Kelly. On "The Diary of Me" his voice ascends over deep bass lines, blissfully evoking the pared-down Stevie Wonder tune "You and I." But most tracks — featuring stream-of-consciousness verses and terse, repetitive choruses ("U saved me! U saved me!") — don't reach those heights. Kelly devolves into ultra-dramatic schmaltz that borders on Broadway showtunes. What other genre but gospel could accommodate the heavy-handed dialogue of "3-Way Phone Call," a duet with R&B singer Kelly Price: "'Sister, do you really believe that I can rise again?'/'Yes, Rob, and not only that, God will forgive you for your sins' "?

Tension between his twin personas — "Kells," the wide-collared, golden-tongued pied piper of *Happy People*, and *U Saved Me*'s "Robert," who longs only for the Lord — has doubtless been heightened by Kelly's dramatic travails. Whether this set is driven by a guilty conscience or a persecution complex, this much is certain: These records are *too* dramatic, *too* personal and, well, too much. Kelly would do better to tone things down a notch or two — and save some theatrics for the judge.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD THESE "The Diary of Me," "If I Could Make the World Dance," "Peace"

JOSEPH ARTHUR

OUR SHADOWS WILL REMAIN ✪✪✪

VECTOR

Peter Gabriel discovery comes into his own with machine-enhanced moods

Last year, guitarist and singer Joseph Arthur toured solo, using a foot-pedal-activated setup of samplers, drum machines and other sound-shaping gizmos. The performances were engrossing — he expanded on the brooding majesty of his three albums, and created new, suitably unsettled backdrops for his tempest-tossed falsetto. The tech-troubadour experience changed his writing approach: Though it contains an almost-pompous anthem ("Can't Exist") and a slapdash celebration of '80s new wave ("Puppets"), the best of *Shadows* lives in murky half-light where texture matters as much as melody. The impressionistic swirls enhance the plights of Arthur's restless characters, who are looking to understand the world, or who, as per the fragile hook of the glorious "Wasted," have fled the apartment and "need to find a place to cry." Without being cloying, Arthur's soundscapes provide that place.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THESE "Devil's Broom," "Wasted"

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ALTER BRIDGE

ONE DAY REMAINS ✪✪

WIND-UP

Former Creed believers hoist the heavily starched flannel

After mucle-bound churchgoer Scott Stapp disbanded Creed, guitarist Mark Tremonti, bassist Brian Marshall and drummer Scott Phillips recruited singer Myles Kennedy to form Alter Bridge (don't worry, you can still catch Stapp on the soundtrack of music inspired by *Passion of the Christ*). Although he climbs scales like a choir-boy Chris Cornell, Kennedy lacks Stapp's Christian-fueled fervor, and Tremonti's guitar pyrotechnics are a harsh overcompensation. From the title track to the unfortunately named "Metalingus," these songs rely on super-fast, super-processed riffing, while others alternate between that and mournful, intricately picked balladry. Kennedy matches this bluster with self-aggrandizing lyrics like "All I'm left with is a crown of thorns" ("Find the Real"). If Stapp's oiled-up bawling didn't suck all the life out of grunge, Alter Bridge are here to beat the final breath out of the genre.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE None

Anita Baker: *Riveted* by positive review.

ANITA BAKER

MY EVERYTHING ✪✪✪

BLUE NOTE

Queen of quiet-storm soul reclaims her throne after a decade's hiatus

Back in the libertine '80s, Anita Baker held the key to seducing a woman of a certain age. Though only in her 20s, she made baby-making ballads with a mature, middle-age sound; her startlingly clear, jazz-trained voice, with its dizzying peaks and dips, conveyed earnestness and swoon even through the most hackneyed lyrics. *My Everything*, her sixth album — her *first* in a decade — sounds like it's been held in a vault since her heyday. She exercises her

Street Fighter

Britain's finest thug shoots back with his mouf

DIZZEE RASCAL

SHOWTIME ✪✪✪✪

XL/MATADOR

"I'M JUST SITTIN' here," Dizzee Rascal rapped on the grim first track of his grim first album, *Boy in da Corner*. Released in the U.S. less than a year ago, it already sounds classic, a white-knuckle tour through a go-nowhere life.

In the time since, the 19-year-old East Londoner has done plenty — sold 250,000 CDs worldwide, survived a stabbing, and made many wonder who would succeed him as London's next hip-hop star. (So far, no one.)

What does he have to show for his success? A slower, grimmer new album. "You people are gonna respect me if it kills you," he snarls on "Respect Me." One reason for his bad mood? "U.K. rapper stabbed in Napa/. . . Retaliate with gun clapper."

This isn't a revenge fantasy, though. Fame and misfortune have driven Dizzee further into his favorite place: his skull. From the engrossing opening track, "Showtime," and the woozy hometown anthem "Graftin'," to the inspirational ballad "Dream," based on a tune from the 1940s musical *South Pacific* (the joke is that it's not a joke), he squints at a world that's not quite hopeless.

A few intended jump-offs never quite jump (the hip-hop-R&B duet "Get By"), and some of Dizzee's insecurity is replaced by newfound swagger. But swagger works, too, especially on the monstrous single "Stand Up Tall," which has a rude synth line and some unexpected pizzicato. As the riot carries on behind him, Dizzee barks, "Pull up your socks and stand up tall." In other words: no more sitting around.

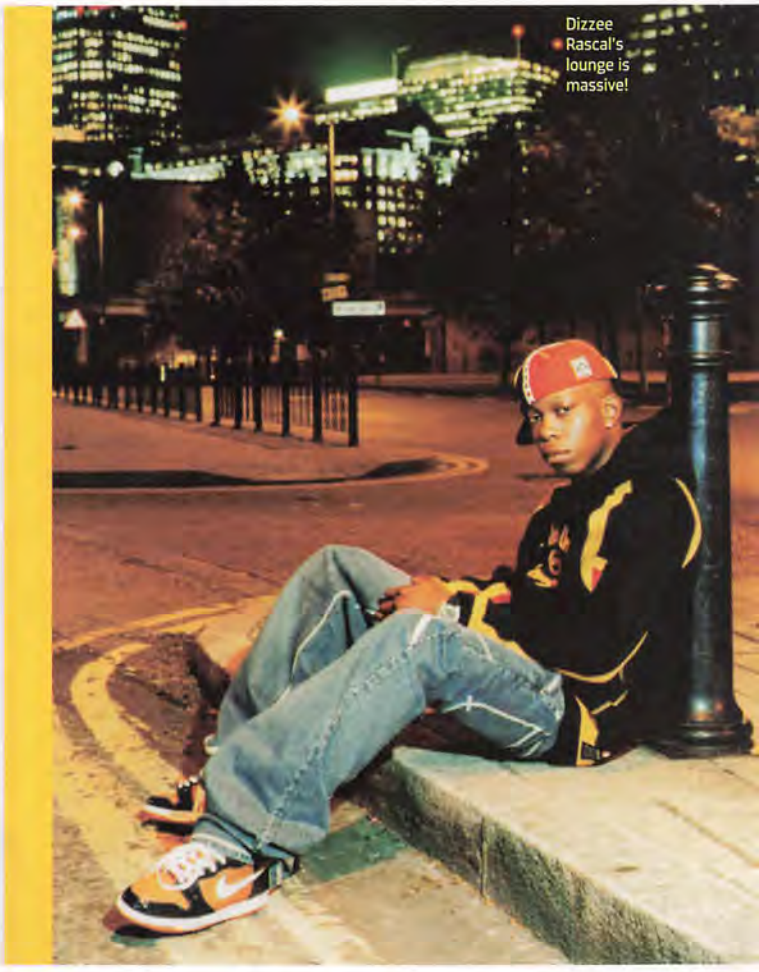
KELEFA SANNEH

DOWNLOAD THESE "Stand Up Tall," "Graftin'," "Girls"

DIZZEE RASCAL'S CURRENT LISTENING

VARIOUS ARTISTS PIECE KEEPERS 2 *HELTER SKELTER*

MARVIN GAYE TROUBLE MAN *MOTOWN*



Dizzee Rascal's lounge is massive!

Björk: "Is there something in my hair?"

jazz chops on a cover of the Yellowjackets' "I Can't Sleep," and the piano ballad "In My Heart" sounds like a sequel to the timeless hit "Sweet Love." Even on the elegant Babyface duet "Like You Used to Do," where Baker frets about a tentative and halting love, her voice — and her conviction — are impregnable.

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Like You Used to Do," "You're My Everything," "In My Heart"

AFRIKA BAMBAATAA

DARK MATTER MOVING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT ✪✪✪✪

TOMMY BOY

Party grooves galore from hip-hop's headdress-wearing Godfather

As the wigged-out maestro behind essential urban singles from 1982's proto-electro blueprint "Planet Rock" through 1992's tribal club classic "Zulu War Chant," Afrika Bambaataa has always maintained an invaluable anything-goes sound. Everything from spaghetti-Western themes to Kraftwerkian computer chatter crops up in his search for the perfect beat. Bambaataa's first album in over a decade is similarly sculpted; disparate dance genres mesh with impressive (and infectious) ease. JB-informed funk gets an irresistible booty-bass boost on "Ain't Talkin' No Shhh" and "Pick Up On This." Gary Numan adds a splash of new wave on a hi-NRG remake of his 1979 synth-popper "Metal." And Bam even wrangles some Dirty South rowdiness on "Shake 'N' Pop Roll," a call-and-response techno blitzkrieg that recalls OutKast at their most chaotic. The Renegade of Funk has returned.

CHAIRMAN MAO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Metal," "No Dope Fiends On the Floor," "Pick Up On This"

BJÖRK

MEDULLA ✪✪✪

ELEKTRA

Icelandic marvel ditches instruments, makes a cappella album

WEIRD, EVEN FOR HER

Thirty-eight-year-old Björk Gudmunsdottir has been roaming around in her own body for decades now, from feet to hips to womb to head to heart. Here, the former Sugarcube and current flame of art star Matthew Barney focuses on what yoga instructors call the "throat chakra," the home of the voice and of spiritual expression. Consisting solely of vocals, *Medulla* jumps past shouting and crooning to encompass far stranger reverberations. The international cast of throat acrobats includes human beatboxes, an Inuit throat singer, folk eccentric Robert Wyatt and yowling avant-metalist Mike Patton, and Björk turns their rubbery emanations into twisty experiments. It's conceptually daring, but beyond a few ecstatic moments (the breathtaking "Piano II," the mad jam session "Triumph of a Heart"), the sound is familiarly Björkish — like a lover's whisper, highly romantic yet intimate. It's another playful step in her unstoppable, wandering quest.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD THESE "Oceania," "Triumph of the Heart"

I LOVE THIS CD!

RON LIVINGSTON
ACTOR IN SEX AND THE CITY, LITTLE BLACK BOOK

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GNP-CRESCENDO

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Previous page, from top: Andrew Eccles; Dean Chalkley. This page, from top: courtesy of Elektra; Carmen Valdes/Retna Ltd.

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The Blues Explosion: "Not another evaporating man!"

THE BLACK KEYS

RUBBER FACTORY ✪✪✪

FAT POSSUM/EPITAPH

Beck-approved blues-rockers roll up their sleeves and get tough

When Jack White went all "It's clobberin' time!" on the Von Bondies' singer, it was shocking: The man sings about winning the affections of his girlfriend's mom, for God's sake. These blues-rock revivalists, on the other hand, sound like they've mopped roadhouse floors with their fair share of whimpering sissy-boys. Only two strong, they make brawny, brutal noise (you totally forget that drummer Pat Carney looks like Andy Dick in a thrift store). For sludge, Dan Auerbach's fat, rocketing riffs are rivaled only by his Delta-dipped drawl, while Carney injects crude stomps with zip and pep. When Auerbach's not singing about post-coital feuds ("10 A.M. Automatic") or valorizing loners ("All Hands Against His Own"), though, he reveals his inner sissy on the ballad "The Lengths." It's pretty enough, but these boys are better at playing bruisers, not licking their wounds.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE "All Hands Against His Own," "Grown So Ugly"

THE BLUE NILE

HIGH ✪✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Slow-burn soul songs for the fade-to-gray generation

When the Blue Nile's Paul Buchanan pleads "Please don't give up" on "Broken Loves," he could be referring to a career that's proceeded at the pace of an Arctic glacier's shift. The Scottish trio's last album came in 1996, and *High* is only their fourth release in 21 years. It follows in the melancholy footsteps of the band's one minor pop triumph, the 1989 album *Hats* and its transcendent single "The Downtown Lights." Vaporous keyboards, egg-shell bass lines, delicate guitar fills and patient melodies allow Buchanan to ruminate on the big questions ("Where are we going with our lives?") in his dimly lit room. Like a shut-in squinting into the sunlight for the first time in a over a decade, he finds a sad ecstasy in the commonplace, a blue-eyed soul crooner for the faded waitress and rumpled commuter inside all of us.

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD THESE "Soul Boy," "Broken Loves," "High"

THE BLUES EXPLOSION

DAMAGE ✪✪

SANCTUARY

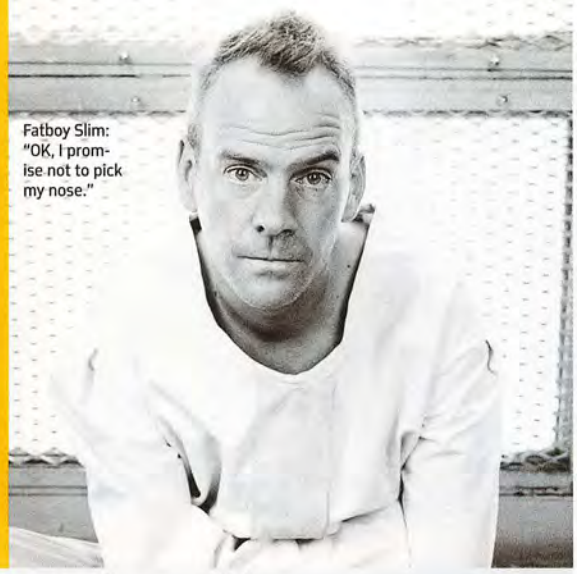
Underground rock stalwart makes the sonic equivalent of *Weekend At Bernie's*

After bruising the blues for the last 12 years, inveterate noisemaker Jon Spencer may have finally rendered it unconscious. *Damage*, the New York scenester's eighth album of ramshackle, fuzzed-out blues poses, is as limp as a broken guitar string. Cuts like "Crunchy" and "Narcissist" amount to little more than nice textures; Spencer's half-ironic, ostensibly sexy rasp is neither seductive nor funny, and frayed blankets of overdriven guitar and bass smother the rhythms. Two songs jump out from this morass: Chuck D lends Public-Enemy sound bites to the lithe anti-war jam "Hot Gossip," and "Fed Up and Low Down" accents Spencer's over-wrought holler with truly explosive chopped-up funk. After all this time spent humping the old, it's almost shocking to hear Spencer refine something new.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THIS "Fed Up and Low Down"

David Raccuglia



Fatboy Slim: "OK, I promise not to pick my nose."

Losing It

The superstar DJ can't find his magic touch

FATBOY SLIM

PALOOKAVILLE ✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

NORMAN "FATBOY SLIM" Cook graduated from his role as bass-player for a middling, soul-influenced '80s indie band called the Housemartins to play a major role building the sound for the '90s' drug-fueled clubbing and rave culture. His forté – stirring funk breaks and rock hooks into party-hearty psychedelic hip-hop – won him dance and rock fans alike. But four quiet years and a wobbly tabloid marriage have unfocused him – it will take more than another zany video turn by Christopher Walken to counter the impression that Cook's dance music has seen better days.

Palookaville hardly bursts with evidence that Cook has moved on. Opener "Don't Let the Man" is a familiar collage of gospel piano and goofy vocal samples ("And the sign said, 'Long-haired freaky people need not apply'" is culled from the Five Man Electrical Band's 1971 hit "Signs"), while the pop-funk cover of Steve Miller's "The Joker" sounds like a gauche bid to soundtrack a Cheetos ad, and will appall Fatboy Slim's hipper constituency.

The Bootsy Collins appearance on "The Joker" highlights another problem for Cook: Where once his wittily juxtaposed samples and laboriously unearthed riffs provided personality in their own right, *Palookaville* is over-reliant on guest vocalists – six in all. Acceptable when it's Damon Albarn (of Gorillaz and Blur) sounding poignant and playful on sparse indie-soul track "Put It Back Together"; not so when it's Quannum's Lateef phoning in an anodyne rap for "Wonderful Night."

Cook gained his fame making drug-frug music inventive enough to enjoy on nothing stronger than an aspirin, but even the set's superior moments ("Jingo"'s crazed, deafening drums quicken the pulse just as "Rockafeller Skank" once did) fail to tickle the old endorphins back to life. He could've been a contender. Now, sadly, *Palookaville* seems the best place for him.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Jingo," "Put It Back Together"

FATBOY SLIM'S CURRENT LISTENING

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WORDS & MUSIC

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Cake: "Does anyone else feel curvy?"

CAKE

PRESSURE CHIEF ✪✪

COLUMBIA

For Sacramento wiseacres, the smirks turn to yawns

Riding an improbable string of droll chart ditties ("Rock & Roll Lifestyle," "The Distance," "Short Skirt/Long Jacket"), Cake has turned their smart-aleck pop into a five-album career spanning a decade. *Pressure Chief* dresses their jadedness in colors that once sounded offbeat, but have now practically become Cake clichés: mariachi horns, chintzy new-wave keyboards and singing so deadpan it makes Ali G sound like a sentimentalist. Though songwriter John McCrea still specializes in imagery to drive They Might Be Giants fans wild ("A karaoke bar by the banks of the mighty Bosphorous"), the hipster thrills are fading. Even the guilty-pleasure novelty songs — a synth-heavy cover of Bread's "Guitar Man" and a typically snide ecology song, "Carbon Monoxide" — get the mix wrong: high on irony, and low on cleverness.

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD THESE "Carbon Monoxide," "Guitar Man," "Wheels"

CAMPER VAN BEETHOVEN

NEW ROMAN TIMES ✪✪✪

PITCH-A-TENT/VANGUARD

World's first post-punk jam band rehabilitate the reputations of both rock opera *and* reunion records

War in Iraq, a Bush in the White House and a new Camper Van Beethoven record — it's like 1990 again, when the psychedelic-gypsy folk ensemble from northern California (best known for "Take the Skinheads Bowling") called it quits. Since then, most original Campers have shared stage or studio time with frontman David Lowery's other combo, brainy roadhouse rockers Cracker. You certainly wouldn't know the band had stopped rehearsing for a single second — *New Roman Times* moves seamlessly from ironic cock-rock and steel guitar-kissed hymns to crisply melodic pop and full-on hippie freak outs, in the service of an angry, funny, pathos-ridden concept album. With his dry delivery and satirical surrealist's eye, Lowery imagines a world where sinister Texans meddle in civil-war-torn California, drugs are all around and killing is done "in the name of our just Lord." Or maybe he's not imagining it after all.

JASON COHEN

DOWNLOAD THESE "Might Makes Right," "Hippie Chicks," "New Roman Times"

KASEY CHAMBERS

WAYWARD ANGEL

✪✪

WARNER BROS.

Spunky alt-country Aussie plays it safe with a mid-tempo hike through well-trod country

With her plucky voice and flair for old-time melodies, Chambers's 2000 debut *The Captain* and 2001's *Barricades and Brickwalls* delighted alt-country fans who craved sassy sadness and fresh-faced ditties just a touch too quirky for Nashville. The fact she was from a TV-less family of fox-hunting campfire musicians distinguished her, as well. But the last few years of homeland stardom and worldwide critical attention have rounded her edges. Her kickoff "Pony" asks the appreciably offbeat question, "If I had a baby/. . . Could I be your girl?" but after that, professionally plucked tunes grapple with lamer ones, like "If I was in a movie" and "If I could learn how to fly." The bittersweet "Bluebird" and piano meditation "Paper Aeroplane" flirt with weirdness, but the pep-talk "Stronger" and the flat "Guilty As Sin" make for a very safe walkabout.

LAURA SINAGRA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Pony," "Bluebird"

Jay Blakesberg

Kasey Chambers decides her beige carpet "is in need of a clean."

Citizen Cope: "What 'Wet Paint' sign?"

CITIZEN COPE

THE CLARENCE GREENWOOD RECORDINGS ✪✪✪

RCA

NYC transplant's second full-length addresses war and insanity – sexily!

Citizen Cope – aka Clarence Greenwood, former DJ for arty D.C. hip-hoppers Basehead – fuses R&B, hip-hop and funk-rock so smoothly that you'd be forgiven for assuming he simply waters down all three. This is sometimes true: The sleepy, drifting "D'artagnan's Theme" is as tasteful and flavorless as Evian. But more often, Cope maximizes the soul in big beats, fluid guitar and his oddly affecting lisp. For a story of some wacko in love with a woman in a wall mural, the reggae-juiced "Pablo Picasso" makes gripping drama: Threatening cops on the chorus, Cope undercuts his belligerence with acute melancholy. And "Bullet and a Target," with its military-march chorus, big-statement lyrics and emphatic hail of handclaps, is one of the best anti-war songs of this election year. True to his DJ roots, Cope juggles his influences without losing the beat.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE "Pablo Picasso"

THE COMAS

CONDUCTOR ✪✪✪✪

YEP ROC

Eleven songs about breaking up with the blonde one from *Dawson's Creek*

Many indie-rock albums are about a girl. The third album from this North Carolina fivesome is, too – only the girl in question happens to be famous. Frontman Andy Herod based this ambitious, aching record on his fractured relationship with – and eventual split from – *Dawson's Creek* star Michelle Williams. In "Tonight On the WB," he moans dreamily, "I love it when you fall apart, you turn it into higher art" – he could be talking about either his ex or himself. The Comas traffic in massive, dramatic choruses that recall both lo-fi popsters Superchunk ("Invisible Drugs") and the Smashing Pumpkins ("The Last Transmission"). Curiously enough, Williams herself appears on a bonus DVD, a narcotic computer-animated/live-action film based on *Conductor*'s music. Will Herod have to embark on a torrid affair with Katie Holmes to inspire material for his next epic?

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Tonight On the WB," "The Last Transmission," "Hologram"

NIKKA COSTA

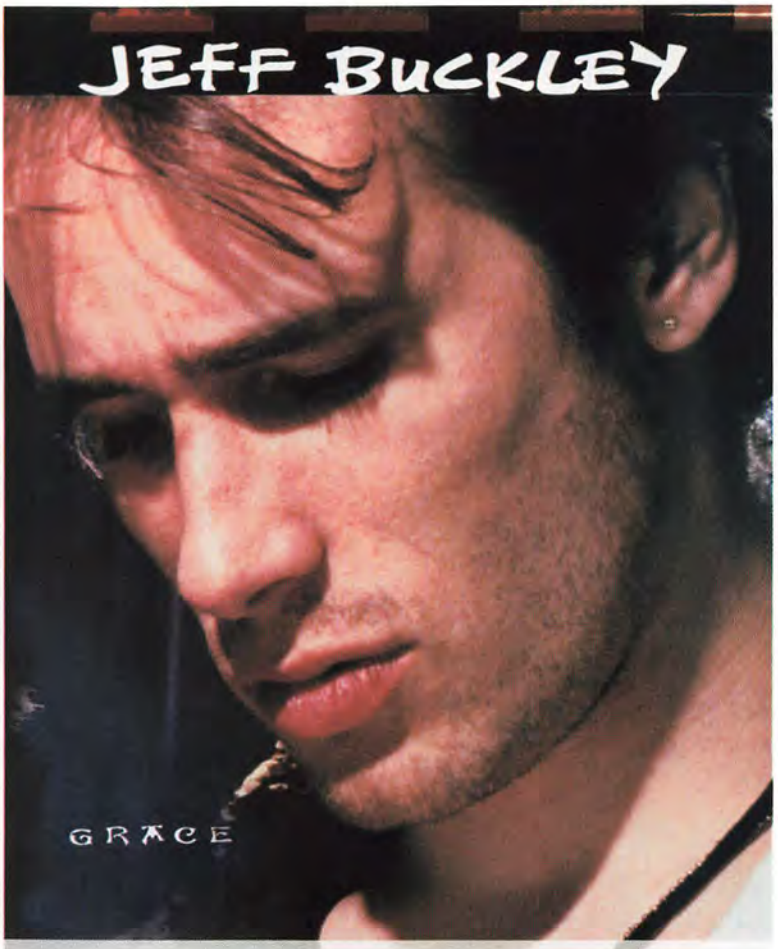
CAN'TNEVERDIDNOTHIN' ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Daughter of Sinatra's producer-arranger leaves hip-hop for rock on second album

Nikka Costa is the white chick answer to Lenny Kravitz. On her 2001 debut, she delivered pleasantly derivative funk, rock and soul, scoring a hit with the slinky R&B single (turned-Tommy Hilfiger jingle) "Like a Feather." Costa's latest shies away from that ➔

From top: Carlota Moyé; Danny Clinch



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tune's addictive hip-hop beats for deeper forays into pop-rock. While her coquettish purr sounds snug on Prince-ly ditties "Till I Get to You" and "All Around the World," she morphs into the queen of overkill when she tries to rock out ("I Don't Think We've Met," "I'm Gonna Leave You"). The yearning "I Gotta Know" and "Fatherless Child," a haunting homage to her late father, music biz veteran Don Costa, prove she's much better on slow burn.

CHAIRMAN MAO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Swing It Around," "I Gotta Know"

ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE IMPOSTORS

THE DELIVERY MAN ✪✪✪✪

LOST HIGHWAY

ELVIS COSTELLO

IL SOGNO ✪✪

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

A double-barreled release from rock's one-man arts festival

Elvis Costello never makes things easy for himself, and his latest self-imposed challenge is storytelling that stretches beyond the length of a song. *The Delivery Man* started out to be an album-length small-town tale of three women seduced by a mysterious delivery man. But partway through, Costello scrambled it, messing with the continuity and interrupting the tale with bulletins from the wider world like "Bedlam," which juggles images of Bethlehem, insane asylums and the chaos of the modern Middle East. Recorded in Mississippi, *The Delivery Man* soaks up Southern atmosphere like biscuits in gravy. The Impostors, Costello's unstoppable band (with two of his old Attractions and a new bass player) are tighter and meaner now than they were two years ago on *When I Was Cruel*. They reach for soul and country and pounding rock, pumping up stomps and ballads full of longing and cantankerousness. It's Costello at his most emotionally direct. *Il Sogno*, written for a ballet version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is a wordless orchestral suite that interweaves pomp, jigs, swing and swooning romance. Costello, who orchestrated the hour-long work, is more than competent with the large structure. Yes, he can do this and do it well, but he's far more galvanizing as Elvis Costello than he is as the next John Williams.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD THESE "Bedlam," "Either Side of the Same Town," "Button My Lip"

CRIME MOB

CRIME MOB ✪✪✪

BME/REPRISE

Lil Jon protégés hope for same success he brought to the word "OK"

Toothy Atlanta producer-turned-pop icon Lil Jon has done it all, from popularizing the swarming rowdiness of Southern crunk to single-handedly salvaging the slumping pimp-cup industry. For the full-length debut from his teenage protégés, Jon ditches the platinum aspirations and returns to his first love: pure, uncut crunk. The Mob sextet (imagine a Dirty South equivalent of Da Band) shouts with the requisite passion ("Crunk Inc.") but the sparse, mean beats are the stars. The infinitely booming "Knuck If You Buck" and the slow-rolling "Put Yo Hands Up" are more like fierce, anthemic jumbles of shout-along directives and melon-busting beats than proper songs. Too raw for radio, but perfect for fighting in the parking lot.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD THESE "Knuck If You Buck," "Diggin' Me"

CROSBY-NASH

CROSBY-NASH ✪✪

SANCTUARY

First in nearly 30 years from the Woodstock warblers

David Crosby and Graham Nash graduated from the Byrds and the Hollies, respectively, to become the most melodic elements in hippie supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. But age — and, likely, Crosby's 20-year drug addiction (cocaine is rarely good for the →

I LOVE THIS CD!

CHRISTINA APPLEGATE
ACTRESS IN *ANCHORMAN*

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS
BLOOD SUGAR SEX MAGIK *WARNER BROS.*

"It's an amalgamation of different kinds of music. It's funk, blues, rock, punk, rap — it's everything. It's a genius album."

From top: Ranjit Grewal; Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.

Interpol: "I thought *you* were bringing the garage key!"

Pieter M. Van Hattem

The Misfits

NYC's swankiest mopes make dance music depressing

INTERPOL

ANTICS ✪✪✪

MATADOR

UNSOLVED MYSTERY Number 666: Why did Joy Division's stark, haunted rock sound so profound and desolate, while those who try to imitate it come off like pompous dorks? Here comes the second album by Interpol, the natty-suited New York band that picked early-'80's mope-rock as its retro vehicle. It has the glassy guitars and grim determination of the era down pat. It also has every bit of the pre-tension, minus two decades of novelty.

THE INGREDIENTS ARE VINTAGE '80s.

The ingredients are vintage '80s: bass riffs a sullen step removed from dance music, unswerving drums, interlocking guitars, and Paul Banks's care-worn, nasal voice, somewhere between Joy Division suicide Ian Curtis and Depeche Mode's Dave Gahan. The textures are as skillful as they are familiar; a little Gang of Four, a hint of Talking Heads and a whole lotta JD and the Smiths.

Banks and Daniel Kessler stagger their guitars with cool precision, and the dynamics of each song are neatly terraced as each part — an unchanging chord, two repeating notes, a hovering sustained tone — clicks into place, drops out and returns, lingering to create finely measured crescendos. The production of "Not Even Jail" ascends toward the anthemic; "Length of Love" revels in the drone. As a whole, *Antics* is less lugubrious and more melodic than 2002's debut, *Turn On the Bright Lights*, but the improvement is marginal.

The problem is the mood. If Interpol's come-ons were any more tortured, they'd violate the Geneva Convention. Even the pastiest goth girl might think twice about a guy who makes his move with lines like: "There is love to be made/So, just stay here for this while/ Perhaps heartstrings resuscitate/The fading sounds of your life." It's a relief when Banks finally brushes aside the metaphors in "C'mere," a relatively peppy, Strokes-like tune where he admits, "You're in love with someone else/ It should be me." Dream on, Mr. Sensitive.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD THESE "Not Even Jail," "C'mere"

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The Fall's always vivacious Mark E. Smith.

The Datsuns order the wrong kind of grass.

voice) — has roughened their once-honeyed harmonies. This reunion shows some flashes of the same songwriting flair that gave us the free-spirited travelogue *Marrakesh Express*, as well as the taste for political commentary that made them anti-Vietnam War figureheads. A double CD is too much of the same thing, though, because the *Crosby-Nash* sound is pretty at best, but insipid in large amounts. And these tribal elders' mix of spiritual serenity and finger-wagging advice quickly begins to grate.

PAUL DU NOYER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Half Your Angels"

THE DATSUNS

OUTTA SIGHT/OUTTA MIND ✪✪✪

V2

More no-frills retro-rock thrills from rowdy New Zealanders

On their 2003 debut, the Datsuns were AC/DC-worshiping gonzo-metallers, for whom no lyric seemed complete without five howled "motherfuckers." Here, they veer into late-'70s radio rock, coached by producer and Led Zeppelin veteran John Paul Jones. The foursome still specializes in billboard-size riffs and speedy power chords ("Blacken My Thumb") but there's less shrieking, more "singing" (admittedly, Dolf de Datsun's clipped vocal range makes Joey Ramone's sound florid). There's even a sensitive, stoned ballad called "What I've Lost." Unlike their last hit, "Harmonic Generator," these are songs about relationships, not guitar pedals. Nonetheless, from the loose-hipped boogie of "Don't Come Knocking" to the Deep Purple-esque psychedelia of "Hong Kong Fury," the Datsuns prove they are still greasy rock & rollers who know how to keep a party going.

APRIL LONG

DOWNLOAD THESE "Blacken My Thumb," "Cherry Lane," "What I've Lost"

ASTONISHING FACT!
In 1991, THE FAINT's Todd Baechle beat the world's best street skateboarder, Eric Koston, in a street and mini-ramp competition. Nice ollie, goth boy!

DONOVAN

BEAT CAFÉ ✪✪

APPLESEED

The world's oldest flower child spills patchouli on your sneakers

Donovan Leitch found early fame as Britain's answer to Bob Dylan before his folkie protest style gave way to hippie dream-pop songs, such as "Sunshine Superman" and "Mellow Yellow." Ever since the '60s ended, the wispy-voiced minstrel has been something of a misfit, though his noodle-headed brand of anti-cynicism has much in common with our culture's current group-hug for all things "spiritual." On his first new album in eight years, he explores his youthful inspirations — not rock, but cool jazz and the beatnik culture of writers like Jack Kerouac. Donovan is expertly backed by respected veterans Danny Thompson on upright bass and Jim Keltner on drums, and if the sound is as hip as a smoky cellar club, it's three times as dated. "You yin my yang," he coos to a lover, a typically gentle cosmic moment. Recommended only to those who would build a bunker out of mellowness.

PAUL DU NOYER

DOWNLOAD THIS "Shambhala"

THE FALL

THE REAL NEW FALL ALBUM, FORMERLY "COUNTRY ON THE CLICK" ✪✪✪

NARNACK

Weathered post-punk veterans in a thuggish mood

On the third revised edition of his 23rd studio album, Britain's most persistent art-punk, Mark E. Smith, is backed by a rugged but faceless incarnation of the Fall. As usual, they hammer out simple, brutal, repetitive grooves while Smith rants in his mush-mouthed Manchester accent about whatever's on his mind (topics here include Spartan warriors, "protein protection" and the Beach Boys' Mike Love). The riffs are heavier, if shallower, than usual, and the rest of the band gets mic time: "Portugal Tour" is somebody sarcastically reading a note from a blown-off, pissed-off journalist. But the mood is unsettling, exhausted and energetic at the same time, as if the Fall can't wait for these songs to be over.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THIS ""Boxoctosis"

THE FAINT

WET FROM BIRTH ✪✪✪

SADDLE CREEK

Dirty-minded synth rockers celebrate the miracle of life

These Anglophiles from Omaha, Nebraska, are a rare breed: new-wave revivalists who don't get off on retro irony. Despite stroboscopic beats and hiccuppy vocals, the Faint's hardcore-synth offensive is about as cozy as a mortuary slab. *Danse Macabre* from 2001 was a disco record for kickball outcasts that inspired the return of scary '80s haircuts. This time, perspiration trumps inspiration, as madly sawing strings and short-circuiting robot bleeps compensate for the lack of hooks. A concept sex album summed up by the title, *Wet From Birth* kicks off with rejection ("Desperate Guys") and blackouts ("I Disappear"), but the guys finally get it up (on the crudely grinding "Erection") and are proud papas by the closing track, appropriately titled

From left: Michael Tedesco; Andy Fallon

"Birth," an unsqueamish ode to procreation that opens matter-of-factly ("In the beginning there was semen . . .") and only gets more graphic from there.
DENNIS LIM
DOWNLOAD THESE "I Disappear," "Birth"

THE FEATURES

EXHIBIT A ✪✪✪

ISLAND

Grown-up and defiantly uncool pogo-party fodder from Sparta, Tennessee!

With a tough-to-Google name and at least one song — frat-anthem-to-be "Blow it Out" — that will follow them to the grave, the Features aren't a band to let fussiness get in the way of an infernally catchy "whoa-whoaaaaa" or "doop-doop-doop." The result: '60s-inflected punk-pop with keg-party fizz, Weezer-standard choruses and a wordy lyrical bent (e.g. "Inside my heart you'll see a little fire/Observe the potential it displays"). Whinnying, preppy-looking singer-guitarist Matt Pelham is the guy who swallowed the thesaurus, spewing out songs about such unlikely rock & roll subjects as growing old with his lovely wife and lovely kids. And though the improbably named Parrish Yaw overdoes the "96 Tears" setting on his keyboard, the lasting impression is one of immense likability tempered by off-putting eagerness to please.
TONY POWER
DOWNLOAD THESE "Blow It Out," "The Way It's Meant to Be"

FEDERATION

THE ALBUM ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Bay-area hip-hop trio introduce the G-crunk era

Federation are probably the only gangsta-rap crew that can get away with calling themselves the "black Bon Jovi." Doonie Baby, Mr. Stres and the wheelchair-bound Goldie Gold act hard, boisterously threatening violence against enemies — and sometimes women — using a very light, self-parodying touch. Rick Rock's shrewd production melds the Dirty South's scabrous chants, the West Coast's self-assured funk, and, on pounding tracks like "Mayhem," rock's metallic edge. But the boys also lampoon pop clichés: "Donkey," which samples the farm animal in question, suggests an absurd new simile for sexiness, while "Hood Rat," an R&B apologia with Spanish guitar licks, features promises like, "I drink a little bit, but don't throw up no more." In rap, that almost passes for maturity.
NICK CATUCCI
DOWNLOAD THESE "Donkey," "You Don't Want It"

Federation *insist* on a midget photographer.

Gov't Mule: "So we *all* hate each other?"

JOHN FOGERTY

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN ✪✪

GEFFEN

Creedence Clearwater Revival leader, 59, fires at tiny targets

Where he used to aim his doomy, faux-Louisiana drawl at corrupt politicians in the late '60s, John Fogerty now sneers at women who talk on the cellphone while they're driving. Throughout this brief, annoying record of rock basics, the semi-retired singer and guitarist fritters his incisive genius on small-minded songs. He starts with the pro-peace generalities of the title track, which reprises a descending bass line from his Creedence hit "Have You Ever Seen the Rain," and vaguely and distractedly compares the war in Iraq to Vietnam. Then it gets worse, as Fogerty chuckles through a series of hen-pecked tales ("She's Got Baggage," "Radar," "Honey-Do") that are as dated as Johnny Carson monologues from 1972. Except for the peaceful, bluegrass-shaded ballad "I Will Walk With You," the record is cutesy when it tries to be warm, and doddering when it tries to be funny.
ROB TANNENBAUM
DOWNLOAD THESE "I Will Walk With You"

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ACTRESS IN *LITTLE BLACK BOOK*

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"If you want to learn about love, listen to that CD. She says it all."

GOV'T MULE

DÉJÀ VOODOO ✪✪✪

ATO/RCA

Southern rock rises again on jam band's fourth studio album

A lot of acts evoke the sound of classic '70s Southern rock — Black Crowes, Drive-By Truckers, Travis Tritt — but how many deliver material comparable to the best of the Allman Brothers or Lynyrd Skynyrd? Well, there's Gov't Mule. On its first studio album since the death of founding bassist Allen Woody four years ago, the jam-oriented quartet scales back the solos to emphasize the songs and frontman Warren Haynes's grittily soulful singing. While the lyrics can be groan-inducing (e.g. "Desiree's in disarray," from "Wine and Blood"), the licks in songs like the snarling "Lola" and the boogie-fueled "Bad Man" more than make up for it. And while the ballads aren't on the epic scale of "Free Bird," there's enough intensity to "My Separate Reality" to inspire a new generation of Bic-flickin' fans.
J.D. CONSIDINE
DOWNLOAD THESE "Lola," "Perfect Shelter," "My Separate Reality" →

WILLIE NELSON & FRIENDS
OUTLAWS AND ANGELS

This new live album from Willie's 3rd USA Network special features Willie performing with some of his closest friends and biggest legends making music today including **Los Lonely Boys, Keith Richards, Merle Haggard, Toby Keith, Lucinda Williams, Al Green, Shelby Lynne, Jerry Lee Lewis** and many more!

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From top: Jonathan Mannion; Danny Clinch; Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.

JEAN GRAE

THIS WEEK ✪✪✪

ORCHESTRAL/BABYGRANDE

NYC's Much-hyped MC says, "Me! Me! Me!"

For eight years, Jean Grae has been an underground rap legend, even though she still hasn't produced a distinctive full-length album. *This Week* is a stab at a breakthrough, featuring a cast of beatmakers who have Jay-Z and 50 Cent credits, and some of the best MCing ever heard — male or female. Grae's flow is flawless, and she spits lyrics with convincing anger. Problem is, those words are rarely about anything but her own dexterity, and the songs whip from scatological pop-rap boasts ("U Don't Want It") to ethereal acoustic soul ("Break"). She comes up with a strong point of view only in "P.S." an answer record to Eminem's epistolary hit, "Stan." "Hey Marshall," she raps, "I pray to god this is your e-mail/Or else someone else is going to read a lot of details."

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

DOWNLOAD THESE "P.S.," "A-Alikes"

GUERILLA BLACK

GUERILLA CITY ✪✪

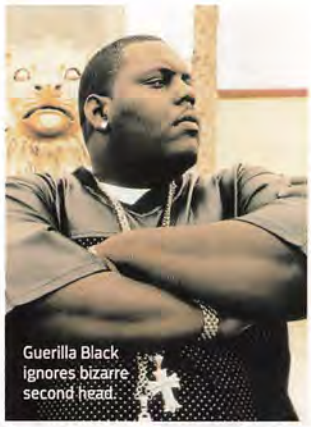
VIRGIN

He sounds like Biggie Smalls. But not where it counts.

Just 40 seconds into *Guerilla City*, Guerilla Black addresses the concerns of the peanut gallery: "He look like B.I.G./He sound like B.I.G." Like Shyne before him, the Compton native is blessed with familiar pipes. And while you can't hold his vocal tone against him, you *can* be mad at what he does with it, especially over a collection of beats this good. He keeps it simple — drugs and thugs, hos and the 'hood — while overambitiously cramming in three syllables where there should be two. Occasionally, over the minimal electro of "Say What" and the dancehall-riddim-riding "Compton," Black's metaphorical skill is awakened. But mostly, this is an exercise in patience, then disappointment — the fruitless wait for something more profound from that familiar voice.

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THIS "Compton"



Guerilla Black ignores bizarre second head.

BEN HARPER AND THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA

THERE WILL BE A LIGHT ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

May-December collaboration for hippies and holy-rollers alike

From the first song, in which a soloing Blind Boy is left crying "Lead me on!" after everyone else has gone home, it's clear that Alabama's oldest gospel stars are not equal partners in this team-up with Californian Ben Harper. Fair enough: They augment his soul, even when all they're doing is adding texture to his tunes. Known for bluesy contemporary folk, Harper has little trouble adding a bit of church spirit to the mix. Though nothing catches fire like the Blind Boys' 2001 comeback *Spirit of the Century*, the best tracks — like the country favorite "Satisfied Mind" — find the common thread running through old-time religion and today's free-form spiritualism.

JOHN DEFORE

DOWNLOAD THESE "Satisfied Mind," "Church House Steps"

HEIRUSPECS

A TIGER DANCING ✪✪✪

RAZOR & TIE

Versatile Midwesterners use instruments, not vinyl, to make jazzy, textured hip-hop

In ancient Rome, a *haruspex* was a priest who foretold the future by examining sheep guts. In our own

Cashed Out

LL's muscles show no age, but his rhymes do

LL COOL J

THE DEFINITION ✪✪

DEF JAM

THAT CAT IN the club effortlessly snagging your girl? That's LL Cool J, 1989 edition. The other dude preening viciously, too confident for his own good? That's LL Cool J, 2004 edition.

Soon after his 1985 debut, LL pioneered the use of hip-hop as a romance language ("I Need Love," "I'm That Type Of Guy"). But now, the next generation of sex symbols, blessed with catchy sing-rap styles (Ja Rule) or youthful, casual arrogance (Chingy), has outpaced the don. Seduction has evolved beyond him, so LL ups the bluster on *The Definition*, his 11th LP, hoping to secure through force what finesse no longer ensures.

It's a bumpy road. Leaning on cacophonous production from Timbaland and newcomer N.O. Joe, among others, he eschews subtlety. "Damn, look at my body," he commands over a fire-alarm beat on "1 in the Morning." On the screechy "Feel the Beat," he recalls being an equal-opportunity loverman: "Spend nights in Trump Towers with a blue-eyed blonde? I *been* did it."

Sometimes, as on "Headsprung" and "Move Somethin'," his indignation at aging produces invigorated rhymes. But mostly, he's outmuscled by the production. And when the music is gentler, it reveals how thin his racket's become. "I'm About to Get Her," with R. Kelly, sounds like a weak update of the crooner's "Fiesta."

LL has gotten his share of free passes recently, thanks to his status as a founding-father of hip-hop and bursts of seasoned hotness. But this is lazy game, designed to raise the temperature of middle-aged housewives.

Be on the lookout for LL Cool J, 2029 edition: the Wayne Newton of rap. Watch out for all the flying granny panties.

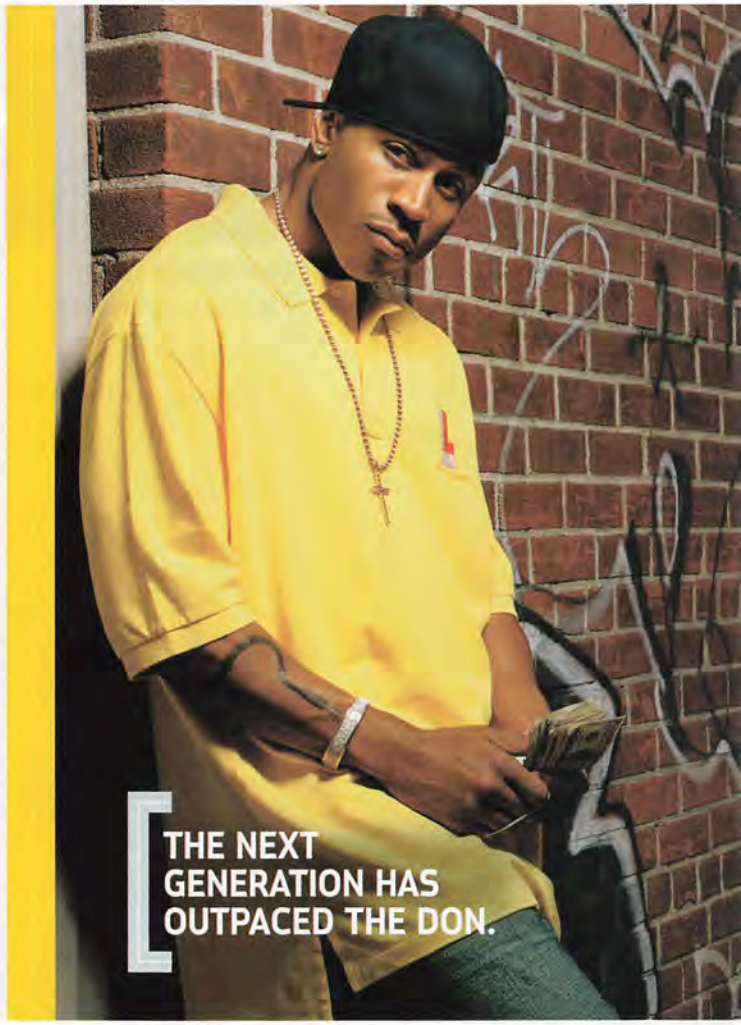
JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THIS "Move Somethin' "

LL COOL J LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

BIG DADDY KANE LONG LIVE THE KANE *COLD CHILLIN'*

LLOYD BANKS THE HUNGER FOR MORE *G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE*



IQU: "See? The mascara and lipstick look better on me."

era, Heiruspecs are a five-man hip-hop band from St. Paul, Minnesota. The group's three musicians are as sonically meticulous as the most obsessive, crate-digging turntablist: Their compositions are often spare, but they create actual songs — not just loops. Smartly orchestrated shifts in mood and tempo give Felix and Muad'Dib, the crew's tag-team lyricists, a dynamic backdrop to work against. "Fist" is a head-banging but cerebral whomp ("Openly grope them pronouns!/ Then properly pronounce the whole sound!"), while the love song "Heartsprings" achieves a swinging melancholy. There aren't any rhymes about sheep mutilation, but these B-boys are as forward-thinking as they get.

G. BEATO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Heartsprings," "Fist," "Marching Orders"

IQU

SUN Q ✪✪✪✪

SONIC BOOM

Rump-shaking disco fun for cyborgs, Francophiles and sushi denizens

The second album by Seattle's IQU is a block party for robots and humans, the kind where everyone starts making out in the corners. Multi-instrumentalist beatmakers Kento Oiwa and Michiko Swiggs have replaced the standup bass of their not-quite-as-ambitious 1998 debut with floor-flexing Daft Punk-y kaboom, but what drives these whomping club grooves over the top is their embrace of human imperfection. Every track's colored by distinctly unmechanical details: scratch-storms and electric guitar freak outs, Oiwa's awkwardly enthusiastic singing on an ode to his favorite sushi, an almost-on-key theremin that carries a twinkling instrumental cover of Minnie Riperton's '70s-soul aria "Loving You" and a hilarious break in "The 9th Line," where the sound seems to drift into the disco's bathroom, then come out zooming again.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "The 9th Line," "Hamachi," "Dirty Boy"

J-ZONE

A JOB AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT WORK ✪✪✪✪

FATBEATS

Absurdist rap from the only MC to brag about redeeming cans for the 5-cent deposits

J-Zone is a pimp on a budget. Where a lesser underground MC might justify his pathetic checking account with a lecture against materialism, this one turns empty pockets into delirious, detail-rich comedy. He picks up girls at dollar stores. He hounds clerks for tap water and condiments-only sandwiches. Throughout his fifth album, the NYC smart-ass peppers his goofy self-deprecation with dazzling, simile-drunk brags. He turns his absurdist eye outward, too, railing against poor hygiene ("You smell like a bag of butt cheeks"), dissing bewigged honeys ("She went from Alicia Keys to Sinéad O'Connor . . . I slapped her scalp with a spatula!"), and satirizing big spenders ("Zone roll through/In a fur coat that look like I killed the whole Bronx Zoo"). The laffs are cheap, sure, but Zone's immature merriment is winning, and his talent is huge: the comical narratives and crisp cartoon-funk evoke Slick Rick and Prince Paul →

I LOVE THIS CD!

HILARY DUFF
ACTRESS IN A CINDERELLA STORY, CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN

BLINK-182
BLINK-182
GEFFEN

"It's a little more serious than their other albums. It has really great songs with good messages to them, and I like that a lot."

ELVIS COSTELLO & THE IMPOSTERS
THE DELIVERY MAN

"...the album is steeped in Southern Americana: the gospel-rooted grooves of Memphis soul, touches of pedal steel guitar, Southern-rooted guest singers including Emmylou Harris and Lucinda Williams and the storytelling that Southern soul shares with country music."
– Jon Pareles, New York Times

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSE DYLAN

FEATURING
MONKEY TO MAN

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Previous page, from top: Jonathan Mannion; Roger Erickson. This page, from top: David Belisle; Gregoris Binuya/Retna Ltd.

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EPIC LEGACY

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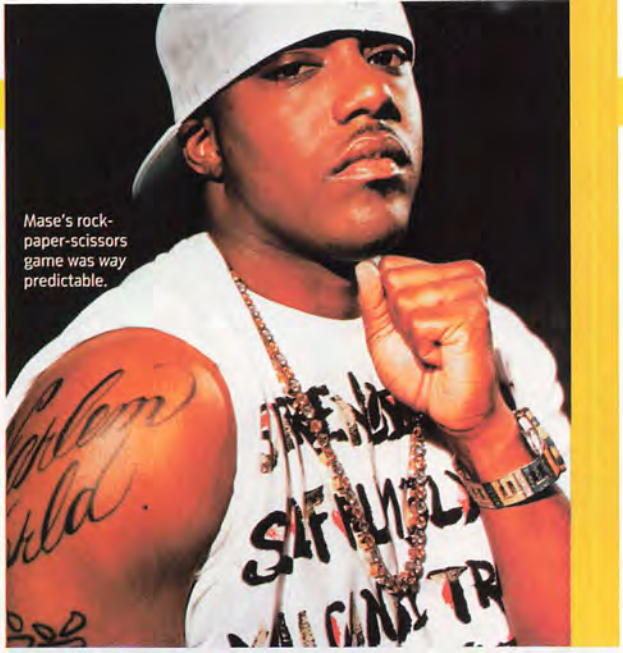

Mase's rock-paper-scissors game was way predictable.

Holy Roller

Rap's finest born-again puts the Christ in Cristal

MASE

WELCOME BACK ✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL

IN 1997, MASON Betha seemed to be the headstone on gangsta rap's grave. His flow was light and sweet as cotton candy, where the recently R.I.P. B.I.G had been hefty with boom and menace. Mase was hero to the Sweet-16 princesses nationwide who liked their misogynists dimpled. And he was the perfect rapper for the flush dot-com era, his shrugged-off rhymes implying that Cristal tasted better the less you had to work for it. But he wasn't anyone's favorite MC.

Seven years later – five of which he spent retired from rap as a pastor – that's changed: 50 Cent has resurrected gangsta, but not without turning Mase's mush-mouthed style into a school; and Kanye West has declared him the best rapper ever. The timing's prime for a comeback, and though Mase found God, he didn't lose his ego. "Me, broke? That's an oxymoron/Forget a bus, I bought a drop to tour on," he raps on "Breathe, Stretch, Shake." His album proves you can wear the cloth *and* subscribe to *Luxury Auto Trader*.

HE FOUND GOD; DIDN'T LOSE HIS EGO.

There's hardly any Christ here, although you sense His hand. Gone are groupie blow-jobs and threesomes: "I tell those girls in Melrose that love Chanel clothes/To keep they legs closed," he says on "Keep It On." On the best song and first single, the *Welcome Back, Kotter*-sampling title cut, he drops his mission: "I make my money without the *coca*/Livin' the *vida* without the *loca*." Driven by bouncy piano and a kiddie chorus, it's like "Hard Knock Life" without the hard knocks.

Mase's righteousness fits the world he's returned to: Tales of three-day champagne binges don't go down quite as smooth anymore, so he offsets them with piety. The album is livelier for its contradictions. When he pledges to "import palm trees" to Harlem, it's half community service, half conspicuous consumption – but it beats a Sunday sermon.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Welcome Back," "Breathe, Stretch, Shake," "Do You Remember?"

MASE LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

FABOLOUS
GHETTO FABOLOUS *ELEKTRA*

YOUNG ROME
FOOD FOR THOUGHT *UNIVERSAL*

Jonathan Mannion

in their respective primes. Recession-era rap has found its hero.
JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Spoiled Rotten," "Edit These," "Disco Ho"

TALIB KWELI

THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE ✪✪✪

MCA

Life is good, but it isn't easy, says socially conscious Brooklyn rapper

Talib Kweli, once a rap partner with Mos Def in Black Star, is an indefatigable poet of conflict and hope. Spitting out raps in a hurried staccato, he rails against the traps of poverty ("Dear Father") and offers a cautionary tale about a star-struck girl seduced into prostitution and drugs (the Neptunes-produced "Broken Glass"). Though not blind to the joys of life (sex, cute little kids), he's at his most inspired when portraying pain as an evil to overcome: "Life is a beautiful struggle/ People search through the rubble/ For a suitable hustle," he says in the Kanye West-produced "I Try," featuring Mary J. Blige in a Gloria Gaynor-like support hook. With a different producer for almost every track, there's little unity of sound, but more than enough passion and unity of purpose.
BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE "I Try," "Broken Glass"

LADY SAW

STRIP TEASE ✪✪

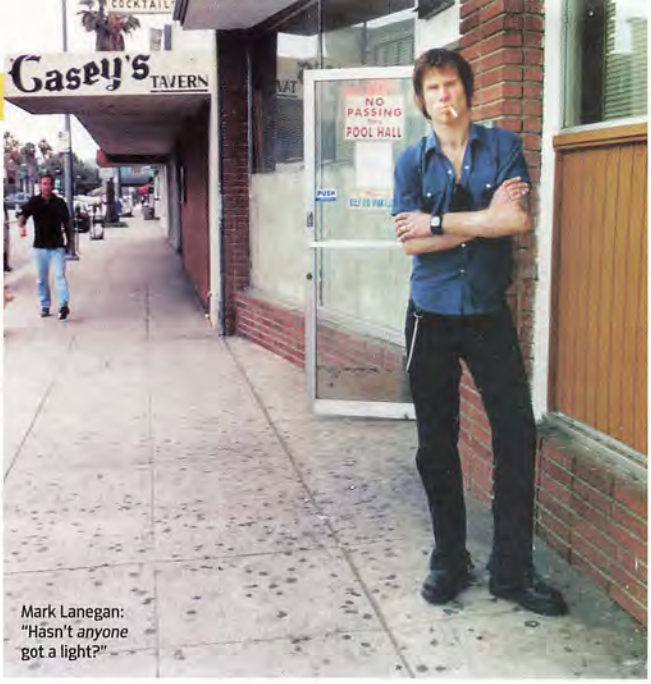
VP

This dancehall vet makes Lil' Kim seem almost virginal

Pity the pussy. In our booty-obsessed era, its praises go largely unsung. Not so with Lady Saw, a verbal gynecologist and Jamaican dancehall diva who was staging Nipplegates at X-rated concerts years before Janet stormed the Super Bowl. Saw debuted in 1994, making her the most enduring female act in a genre more masculine than Spike TV. On her fifth album, she showcases her secret to survival: a voice both sonorous and strident, seductive and predatory at once. Even those unschooled in Jamaican patois will discern the lyrics that matter: "cock," "cum," "tits" and, of course, "pussy." Unfortunately, Saw's beats are as crude as her language, and her brassy, dancehall vocal style sounds overly aggressive on R&B-tinged tracks that end up falling flat ("I've Got Your Man," "Strip Tease"). This album lacks the artful subtlety of a striptease – it's an uneven, unbridled sexual ambush.
BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Man Is the Least"

Anita Hrnjak



Mark Lanegan: "Hasn't *anyone* got a light?"

MARK LANEGAN BAND

BUBBLEGUM ✪✪✪✪

BEGGARS BANQUET

On sixth album, former Queens of the Stone Age singer celebrates famous friends, alcohol

For 20 years, Mark Lanegan has lent his low, meaningful growl to balls-out rock monsters the Screaming Trees and, later, Queens of the Stone Age. All the while, he's had extracurricular angst to spare, kicking out five solo albums: 2001's potent but sketchy *Field Songs* was the last. A full-time solo artist since QOTSA's implosion earlier this year, Lanegan has finally produced his long-threatened masterpiece. *Bubblegum* is a keg party thrown for close friends who share at least one deep bond: rehab. Izzy Stadlin and Duff McKagan of G'N'R and Velvet Revolver fame add muscle to "Strange Religion," while former QOTSA mucker Josh Homme lends his knowledge of sadness and pills to "Methamphetamine Blues." But it's Lanegan's duets with PJ Harvey – "Hit the City," and the high moisture content booty call "Come to Me" – that really make this set essential.
MICHAEL ODELL

DOWNLOAD THESE "When Your Number Isn't Up," "Hit The City," "Come to Me"

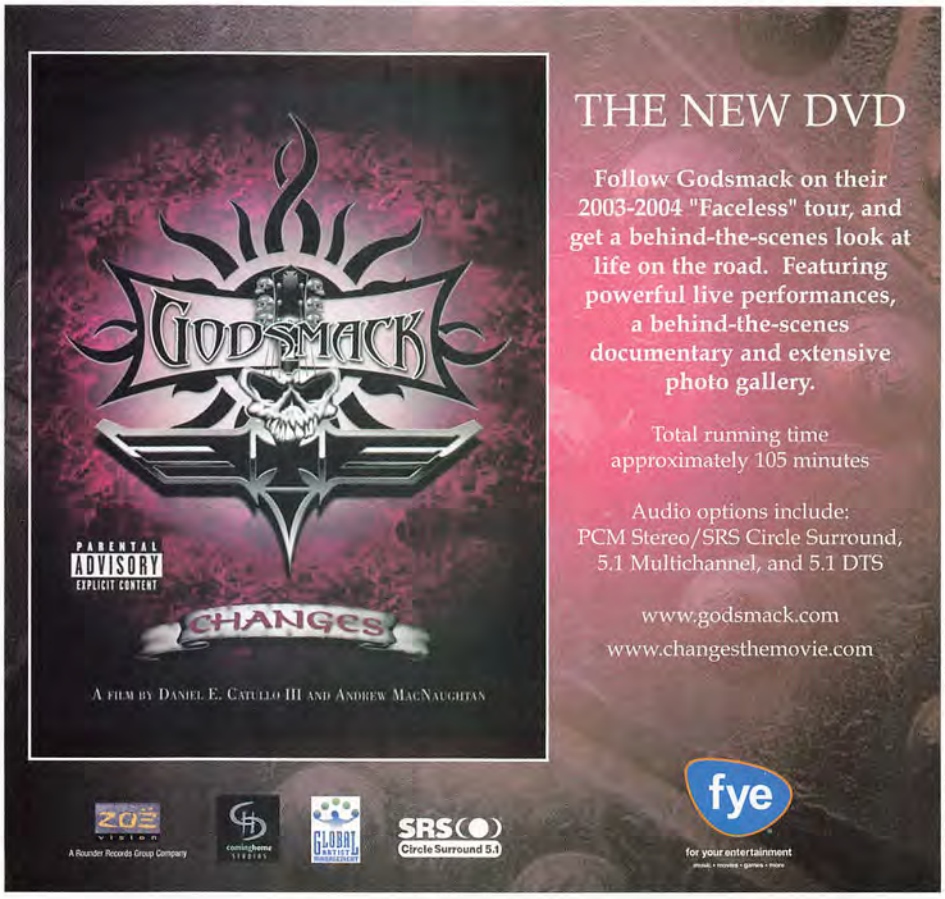
TOM MCRAE

JUST LIKE BLOOD ✪✪✪✪

NETTWERK AMERICA

Great second album from intense English songsmith

Singer-songwriters often get so wrapped up in their words that they forget to make absorbing music, but not Tom McRae, who writes moody tunes with the incisiveness of Radiohead or Coldplay. Back in 2000, he captured British ears with his great eponymous debut dwelling on the nerve-wracking nature of love and international relations – and his follow-up is just as impressive. "Karaoke Soul" unwinds with darkly circular guitar riffs, but other songs, such as "You Only Disappear" and "Human Relations," hammer together tricky yet searing structures; McRae lets his arrangements talk, too. "I'm the breath on your face/You think you are safe," ➔



McRae sings in "Line of Fire": his music is like that, a strong blend of the airy and the scary.
JAMES HUNTER
DOWNLOAD THESE "A Day Like Today," "Ghost of a Shark," "Karaoke Blues"

MEGADETH

THE SYSTEM HAS FAILED ✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Metal's infamous 20-year-old feud wakes a sleeping beast

Back in 1983, enraged by getting kicked out of "Alcoholica" (for drunkenness!), Dave Mustaine fought back by playing faster and jazzier than his ex-bandmates in Metallica; Megadeth made speed-metal swing, and later conquered the pop charts with born-again pro-wrestling anthems. But it's never been enough: as Mustaine carps to Lars Ulrich in *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster*, he's always been "number 2." Maybe so, but for thrash-era nostalgia, *The System Has Failed* kicks *St. Anger*'s ass. Backed by a new rhythm section, Mustaine's zippery, raking riffs recapture the spidery grandiosity ("Blackmail the Universe") and gothic melodrama ("The Scorpion") that have been MIA from Megadeth's records since 1990's *Rust In Peace*. Founding guitarist Chris Polland returns for some mighty shredding, and Mustaine's paranoid, apocalyptic sneer hasn't sounded this relevant in years. He's still bugging out about Metallica, though: "We all laughed at the parodies you'd become," he jeers on "Something I'm Not." Perhaps someone needs to see a therapist?
CARLY CARIOLI
DOWNLOAD THESE "Blackmail the Universe," "Back In the Day"

THE MENDOZA LINE

FORTUNE ✪✪✪✪

BAR/NONE

Brooklyn hipsters gulp beer, big up the working man — and write a song about Dick Cheney?

The Mendoza Line (who named themselves after baseball's measuring stick for offensive mediocrity, Mario Mendoza) are an infamously boozy quintet from Brooklyn. The group has three distinct songwriters: raspy, Dylan-esque Timothy Bracy, sweet 'n' sensitive Pete Hoffman, and sassy, countrified Shannon McArdle. On the group's fifth and best record, these constant shifts in perspective aren't distracting, they're divine. Bracy, who's world-weary but never beaten, croaks working-class anthems "Fellow Travelers" and "The Road to Insolvency," while Hoffman's pithy pop has never been better, particularly on the devastating "Let's Not Talk About It," a ballad that is either about an ex or Dick Cheney. And McArdle has blossomed into a 20-something torch singer — she's Loretta Lynn with student loans — especially tripping amidst the triple-entendres of "It's a Long Line (But It Moves Quickly)." Proof that binge drinking isn't all bad.
ANDY GREENWALD
DOWNLOAD THESE "Let's Not Talk About It," "It's a Long Line (But It Moves Quickly)," "The Road to Insolvency"

Papa Roach never get the table by the window.

THE PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LOVE EVERYBODY ✪✪✪

PUSA

Multiplatinum clown-punkers make their comeback bid on indie ticket

In 1995, three Seattle goofballs wrote a love song about a tumor called "Lump," offering some comic

St. Louis Blues

Mr. Tailfeather reaches for the keg — *and* the Kleenex

NELLY

SWEAT ✪✪✪✪

SUIT ✪✪✪

FO'REEL/UNIVERSAL

AFTER THE LADIES have left, the plastic cups have been swept from behind the toilet and the panties have been picked from the chandeliers, what becomes of the Life of the Party? Since his debut, Nelly has documented nothing but the life of an irrepressible pleasure-hound, gathering apple-bottoms and plucking tailfeathers in a 24-hour club. His melodic drawl ripples with pleasure, turning raps into sing-songs. When he released his first down-tempo single in 2002, it wasn't about lost homeys or love — it was about Pimp Juice.

Here, though, Nelly gives airtime to hedonism *and* the morning after. *Sweat*, the dancefloor LP, is more fun, but that's the point. On "Flap Your Wings," he seems to encourage women to flap their arms, breasts, butt-cheeks, or all three. "Tilt Ya Head Back," featuring Christina Aguilera, stages a raucous club seduction, while "Heart of a Champion" is guaranteed to amp athletes worldwide. Nelly declares, "I got that can't-stop-won't-stop in my veins."

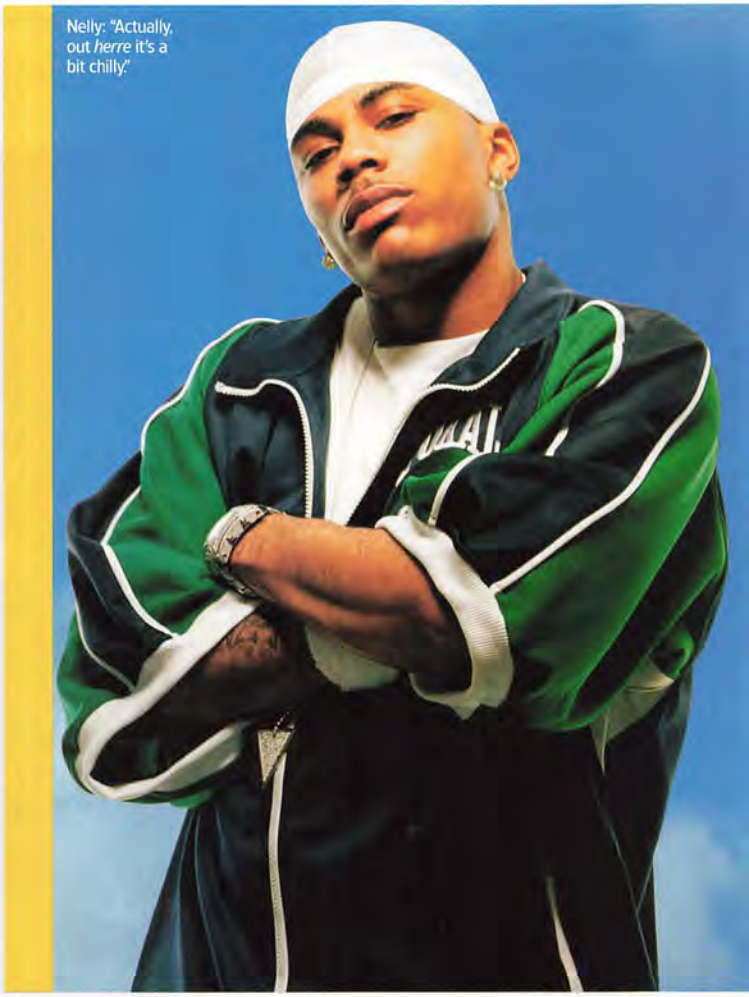
By turns sensual and despondent, *Suit* tries to prove that claim wrong. It nearly does so to a fault, leading with his most boring work ever. The Neptunes-produced "Play It Off" is a smooth-jazz snore, while the drooling "Paradise" proves you can have any woman and still not know what they want.

Things do get more interesting. He meets a homeless man on "N Dey Say," learning so much about humility that he devotes the next song to his luxury interior. Surprisingly, the best song features Tim McGraw: "Over and Over" is gripping sap driven by the most (only?) sorrowful vocal performance of Nelly's career. Who knew he had it in him?
JONAH WEINER
DOWNLOAD THESE "Heart of a Champion," "Over and Over"

NELLY LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

CHINGY JACKPOT *DISTURBING THA PEACE/CAPITOL*

MISSY ELLIOTT THIS IS NOT A TEST *THE GOLD MIND/ELEKTRA*


Nelly: "Actually, out *herre* it's a bit chilly."

relief from grunge and scoring a smash hit. Here, the airplay-friendly pop-punker "Some Postman" attests that POTUSA refuse to go gently into the good night of cultural footnote status. As punk rockers, they're way more hacky-sack than Mohawk; think Primus for people who like hooks. For much of their fourth album (released on their own label), caffeinated dorm-room whimsy prevails, until a few suite-like numbers – a sort of nerd-prog – break the mold. The refreshingly acerbic "Shreds of Boa" rues a misspent rock youth, while "5,500 Miles" details a spooky cross-country odyssey. Singer Chris Ballew is now a 38-year-old dad and his best songs – the Cheap Tricky "Zero Friction," the Twainian reverie of "Munky River" – are about escaping adult cares. So is, unfortunately, his third-grade threat to "run my nose through your hair." That's just gross.
MICHAEL AZERRAD

DOWNLOAD THESE "Munky River," "Shreds of Boa," "5,500 Miles"

PAPA ROACH

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER ✪✪✪

GEFFEN

Cali alt-metalers' latest metamorphosis: coming clean

On 2002's *Lovehatetragedy*, a prescient nü-metal mea culpa, the man once known as Coby Dick gave up rapping, fessed up to his real name, and snuck in a cover of the Pixies' "Gouge Away." Now Jacoby Shaddix has quit drinking, too – "I got a busted liver and a broken heart," he reveals – but the real surprise is that he can carry a tune. His band remains unsubtly one-dimensional – even when they ease acoustic guitar and Wurlitzer organ into the mix – but Shaddix funnels a newfound sensitivity into gashing, coarsely melodic emo-metal that aches as much as it breaks. When he bawls, "My problem is I feel too much," on the power-ballad "Scars," it could almost be Trent Reznor taking solace in Creed's wide-open arms. Even on standout ragers "Do or Die" and "Be Free," a pleading edge colors their desperation: proof there's more to *Getting Away With Murder* than anger management.
CARLY CARIOLI

DOWNLOAD THESE "Getting Away With Murder," "Do or Die"

DOLLY PARTON

LIVE & WELL ✪✪

SUGAR HILL

Veteran crossover star edges away from recent success with basic bluegrass

Pop-country legend Dolly Parton is almost as famous for her "aw-shucks" charm as for her ample bosom, and her willingness to let fans in on the joke of fame has buoyed her popularity through the seas of musical fashion. She relies on that style throughout *Live & Well*, knowing that the de-glitzed elegance of *The Grass Is Blue* and *Little Sparrow* (her recent, excellent bluegrass-centric records) won't work performing in an arena. The jokes are sweet and corny, the down-memory-lane introductions rehearsed but sincere, and the vocal performances more prone to cutesyness and over-emoting. Her cover of Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush" benefits from a tender interpretation, far more than her inexplicable "Stairway to Heaven."
JOHN DEFORE

DOWNLOAD THIS "Little Sparrow"

The Prodigy's Liam Howlett flouts new "Finger Gun" legislation.

Dolly Parton: "And this one's called 'Kashmir'. . . ."

THE PRODIGY

ALWAYS OUTNUMBERED, NEVER OUTGUNNED ✪✪

MAVERICK

Dance-punk mavens take seven years to follow their big hit

Rapper Maxim and singer-firestarter Keith Flint aren't the only vital ingredients missing from the Prodigy's long-delayed fourth album. You can add to that list excitement, versatility and the sense of gleaming, steely purpose that made them the dark stars of the late '90s electronica boom. No matter what studio mastermind Liam Howlett throws into the mix here, from a clutch of familiar samples (Michael Jackson, Shocking Blue's "Venus") to a small army of guests (Oasis, Twista) every track emerges as ugly and joyless as the one before, heavy with the kind of aimless aggravation that routinely fills snowboarding videos. The most characterful song here is a warped, retitled, hijacking of the 5th Dimension's "Up, Up and Away," performed by *Natural Born Killers* actress Juliette Lewis. That can't be right, surely.
DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD THESE "Hotride," "Girls"

DAMIEN RICE

B-SIDES ✪✪✪

VECTOR

An EP of vault goodies designed to satisfy high-carb dieters

Before he starts the song, Damien Rice provides a date-stamp: "December 3, '97, song called 'Volcano,' " he says in a sullen, sleepy voice, as he gathers strength to sing an erratic early version of what became a signature tune. The track's prelude shows how Rice, who rocketed to the top of troubadour-land with his 2003 debut *O*, kept track of his writing. But it also suggests strong self-awareness – even then, the Irishman anticipated that pop historians might someday pore through his cassette box, hunting for the first sparks. The demo of "Volcano" is, happily, the only self-mythologizing on *B-Sides*, which includes one live track ("Delicate") and a surprisingly vivid instrumental ("Volcano"). Several tracks left off of Rice's debut – the bewitching sex-roles ode "Woman Like a Man" and a brooding reverie entitled "Moody Mooday" – suggest a sensibility more brazen than that exhibited on *O*. Here's hoping he lets that side shine on the followup.
TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THESE "Woman Like a Man," "Volcano" ('97 demo)

RISE AGAINST

SIREN SONG OF THE COUNTER CULTURE ✪✪✪

GEFFEN

Chicago rabblerousers make their big-money debut

In the wake of behemoth chart success enjoyed by Simple Plan and Good Charlotte, major labels have started snatching at regional punk acts, hoping for a sound that will invigorate whiny suburban boys nationwide into busting open their chain wallets. This Chicago foursome is the latest object of the feeding frenzy, but at their album's start it seems as though they're destined for little more than a dejected stumble back to the Warped Tour second stage: "State of the Union" is a shouty, grinding dirge that belongs on a tiny label. But then something unexpected happens: with "The First Drop" – pulsing, anthemic and irresistible – frontman Tim McIlrath reveals that he's got something to scream *and* something to say. He rails against teen apathy, aided by deft bandmates and armed with cracking hooks. On "Life Less Frightening," the finest song here, he acknowledges the allure of complacency while attacking it at the same time. This is complicated, catchy hardcore – there's even a tender ballad about holding hands called "Swing Life." Tied in knots, by turns sweet and enraged, McIlrath is as likely to hug you as hit you.
ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE "Life Less Frightening," "Paper Wings"

I LOVE THIS CD!

WILL SMITH
ACTOR IN *I, ROBOT* & *SHARK TALE*

TAKE 6
TAKE 6
REPRISE

"It's my favorite album ever. I listen to it more than anything. When I put it on, it wakes me up in the morning. The energy is right."

Previous page, from top: Olaf Heine; James White. This page, clockwise from left: Courtesy of Maverick Records; Dennis Carney; Doug Peters/Allactiondigital.com/Retna Ltd.

RICH ROBINSON

PAPER ✪✪✪

KEY HOLE

Shock-free solo debut from Black Crowes riff-man

Like the two solo albums his brother Chris already made, Rich Robinson's first record under his own name proves the Black Crowes' ongoing hiatus is no more about musical differences than it is about the suitability of wearing purple crushed velvet onstage. Whether hinged around epic riffs or wistful noodling, all of *Paper*'s songs could have appeared on a Crowes CD. Some could even have featured on the really good albums, notably the "Remedy"-ish "Enemy." Alas, as vocalist, Robinson makes for a great guitar-player. True, he can hold a tune, but only just — and, unlike *frère* Chris, he has no real idea what to do with the sucker once it's in his grasp.

CLARK COLLIS

DOWNLOAD THESE "Enemy," "Places"

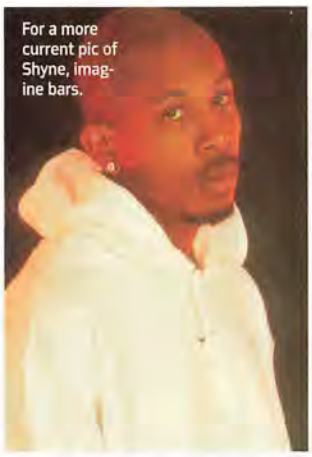
SHYNE

GODFATHER BURIED ALIVE ✪✪

GANGLAND/ DEF JAM

Inmate 01-A-3886 disses the justice system, 50 Cent and other haters

Many gangstas feel persecuted. Currently serving 10 years for his part in a 1999 club shooting, Shyne's earned the right. His second album, recorded mostly in 2000 as he stood trial alongside then-mentor Puff Daddy, doesn't just settle for lashing out at the world, though; instead, it seethes, his charcoal stick of a voice soaked in venom and disgust. Thanks to Shyne's lurid bio and frothing street hype, Def Jam signed him for a reported $10 million. On the bleak "Quasi OG," he almost sounds worth it: Shyne calls out "cold jurors and this heartless judge," blames his "faggot-ass pops" for neglecting him, and finally announces, "I'm a snort away from a overdose." But many beats (including the slack Kanye West-helmed "More or Less") sound cheap, and many rhymes (check the literally phoned-in 50 Cent dis "For the Record") trade drama for tough-guy same-old. Even Alan Dershowitz can't help with that.



For a more current pic of Shyne, imagine bars.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Quasi OG," "Diamonds and Mac 10s"

SILKWORM

IT'LL BE COOL ✪✪✪

TOUCH AND GO

Grim Chicago rockers clench their muscles — hard!

Silkworm's songs crunch like cannonballs on gravel. The seven meaty tracks (and molten instrumental coda) here are severe, formal, painted in black and white — it's hard rock rigorously stripped of frivolity and glamour, built for catharsis more than pleasure, cracking a bitter little smile at most. On their ninth album, the band allots some room to their barbed lyrics ("Your face will grace God's marble doorstep/If he even exists to fuckin' hear the knock") and clenched-teeth singing, but they make it clear that their fealty is to force (especially Andy Cohen's slash-and-burn guitar) and timing (their feral rhythm section). Even when they're holding back a little or playing acoustic instruments, you sense they are just counting the seconds until they can bear down on yet another nice, loud riff.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "'Don't Look Back,'" "Shitty Little Yacht"

JILL SOBULE

UNDERDOG VICTORIOUS ✪✪✪

ARTEMIS

Witty "I Kissed a Girl" folk-popstress refuses to enter the zombie world of one-hit wonders

Pop's bright hallways are haunted by the pale, tired ghosts of artists who never repeated the success of a novelty hit. In 1995, Jill Sobule broke through with the wry, lesbian-chic anthem "I Kissed a Girl." Nearly 10 years later, on her breezy, winning fifth album, she refuses to rattle her chains. With a raspberry fizz of a voice, the Brooklyn transplant sings for the love of throwaway pop, while remaining acutely aware of how much pop can take out of you: In "Freshman," she constructs a rueful diorama of a not-so-young would-be star. Mostly, though, she's unabashed about the lifelong pleasure she's taken in '60s and '70s A.M. radio. For "Cinnamon Park," she even borrows the riff from Chicago's "Saturday In the Park." Sobule's not just reworking old sounds, she's got them in her blood — proving that

From top: Anthony Cutajar; Joslin Stephens

Cracking a Smile

Utah stars brighten up, take the scream out of screamo

THE USED

IN LOVE AND DEATH ✪✪✪✪

REPRISE

ON THE USED'S debut, Bert McCracken's feral growls endeared the group to head-banging Hot-Topic shoppers, while his sweet-whined, adenoidal alto on "The Taste of Ink" proved a perfect fit for Abercrombie emo kids.

In Love and Death proves they are more than just pan-mall all-stars. They've given up on ugliness for its own sake, trading it in for prettiness, which allows McCracken to rest his throat.

Half the tunes here are scream-free, and on the jaunty "Cut Up Angels," McCracken even finds the sunny side of suicide pacts ("If we go at the same time, they'll clean up the mess"). Throughout, the band flicker from Jekylls to Hydes, as McCracken picks at the scars of his drug addiction ("Let It Bleed") and lures a girlfriend back to bed ("I Caught Fire (In Your Eyes)").

Eventually, they go overboard, notably on the tear-stained prom ballad "It's Hard to Say," where McCracken sobs apologies (to his ex Kelly Osbourne, perhaps?), while guitarist Quinn Allman drapes the room in crepe-paper arpeggios. But as if in penance, McCracken turns on himself on the closing "I'm a Fake," howling the song's title until self-loathing trumps self-pity.

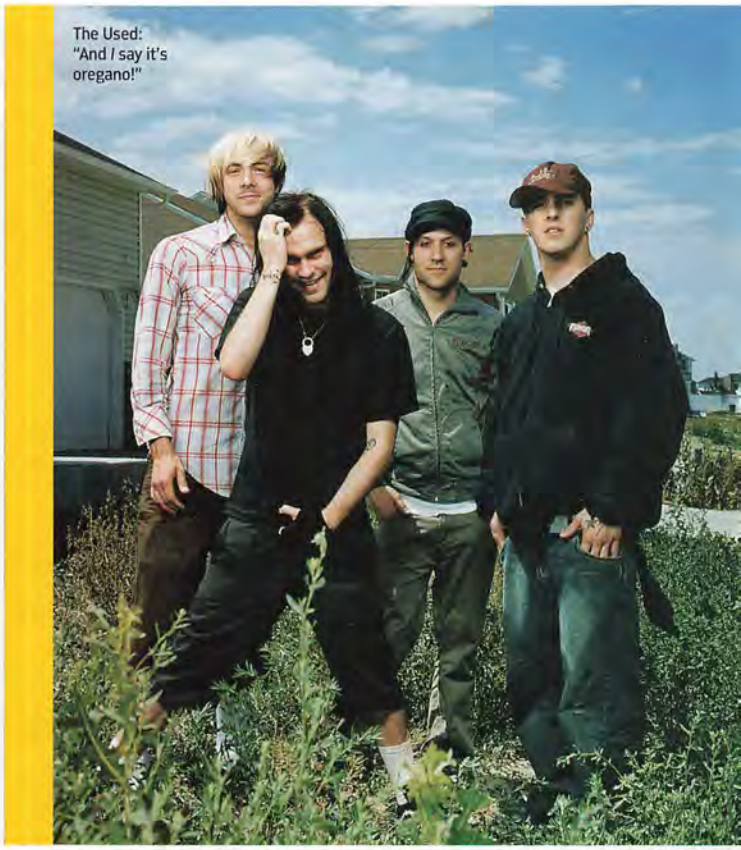
CARLY CARIOLI

DOWNLOAD THESE "I Caught Fire (In Your Eyes)," "All That I've Got," "I'm a Fake"

DRUMMER BRANDON STEINECKERT'SCURRENT LISTENING

MUSE
ABSOLUTION *WARNER BROTHERS*

HEAD AUTOMATICA
TALKIE WALKIE *ASTRALWERKS*



The Used: "And I say it's oregano!"

pop's cruelly short attention span can hurt, but it can make you stronger, too.
STEPHANIE ZACHAREK
DOWNLOAD THESE "Cinnamon Park," "Thank Misery"

SONS AND DAUGHTERS

LOVE THE CUP ✪✪✪

DOMINO

Franz Ferdinand's country-obsessed pals whip up a Scottish hootenanny

VIOLENCE-OBSESSED SCOTS

Sons and Daughters' debut plays like the soundtrack for a high-noon duel between the Highlander and Clint Eastwood. This Glasgow foursome is equally infatuated with traditional Scottish folk and American honky-tonk, staging unlikely and exciting encounters between both. At their best, they're masters of suspense, evoking a dark world of loose morals and impending violence. With titles like "Fight," "Broken Bones," and "Blood," their foreboding songs build and build friction, but usually withhold the cathartic outbursts they threaten. The best thing here is "Johnny Cash," a smoldering boogie featuring Scott Paterson's off-key brogue: It never bursts into flame, but it rubs a hell of a lot of sticks together – this is the scene where pistols are unholstered, chairs topple, and waitresses scatter. The powerful effect is of an itch teased to unbearable insanity, screaming for a scratch that never quite comes.
JONAH WEINER
DOWNLOAD THESE "Fight," "Johnny Cash," "Awkward Duet"

JOSS STONE

MIND, BODY & SOUL ✪✪✪

S-CURVE

Despite the title, Brit beauty steps back from retro-soul for the Aguilera market

Eighteen-year-old Joss Stone is cursed with a great voice – a plummy, gritty thing of tremendous range and power. Hearing her try to make like Gladys Knight on 2003's Miami funk-styled *The Soul Sessions* was like watching a 12 year old with 36Ds imitate Marilyn Monroe – sure some guys find it sexy, but they're perverts. For the rest of us, perhaps paradoxically, this album's compromise with the teen-pop divahood she was groomed for will feel like a bid for authenticity. Stone's infatuation with band grooves provides relief from the radio-ready synthesizers and compressors. And processed through an instrument more solid than Christina Aguilera's or Pink's, song-doctored fabrications like "Jet Lag" and "Don't Cha Wanna Ride" split the difference between guaranteed hook appeal and a decent simulation of emotional truth.
ROBERT CHRISTGAU
DOWNLOAD THESE "Jet Lag," "Don't Cha Wanna Ride"

Skye Sweetnam: "Of *course* I've ridden a bicycle before."

Joss Stone regrets swapping shoes for flower.

SKYE SWEETNAM

NOISE FROM THE BASEMENT ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Canadian brat makes mallrat pop from a mall-free town

At first, 16-year-old Skye Sweetnam comes off as a record label think-tank hybrid: wholesome like Britney Spears before the whole insta-marriage thing, and punk-rock-lite like Avril Lavigne. Raised in a mall-free, forest-bordered Canadian town with nary an Internet connection to call her own, the teen took to co-writing songs with a young producer in his parents' basement. Her adolescent angst is pretty tame: kicking the Coke machine on "Tangled Up In Me," refusing to read Shakespeare on last year's "Billy S.," using rejection as fuel for success on the WNBA anthem "Number One." But Sweetnam shows some baby teeth on "Hypocrite," where she attacks those who'd dismiss her as an "Avril-lite" using "Pro Tools all the way," and a remake of Blondie's late-'70s disco burner "Heart of Glass" shows genre-skipping verve.
KRIS EX
DOWNLOAD THESE "Number One," "Heart of Glass"

I LOVE THIS CD!

DAVID CROSS
VICTIM IN ETERNAL SUFFERING OF THE SPINNING MIND

ELVIS COSTELLO
ARMED FORCES
RHINO

"His lyrics were unlike anything I'd heard, and that fast, edgy, angry-nerd thing was very appealing to me. I still get excited when I hear that music."

THEODORE UNIT

718 ✪✪✪✪

SURE SHOT

The Wu-Tang's most consistent MC unveils a new outerborough posse

Ghostface's bid for 2004's hip-hop MVP seems like that much more of a sure thing. Fresh off *The Pretty Toney LP* – the year's funkiest, most gloriously nonsensical rap record yet – comes this almost-sequel by his new seven-MC crew, packed with Pretty Toney outtakes and *Pretty Toney*-like beats (hammering kick-drums, brass fanfares lifted from classic soul records). The outtakes are irresistible (especially the oft-bootlegged "Gorilla Hood"), but the surprise here is the strength of the whole set. Unlike most star-fronted posse records – notably, that of a certain other "Unit" – 718 sounds less like a crass commercial ploy to prime the market for solo albums than a gathering of acolytes: Theodore Unit's best MCs imbibe Ghostface's spirit of abandon, his gasping, sing-song style, and his devotion to passionately declaimed non sequiturs. "We . . . like Pacino in the original script for *Chinese Coffee*/ Like the Tribe of Malachi," rasps Solomon Childs in "Mama Can U Hear Me." Hours of fun await Wu cryptologists everywhere.
JODY ROSEN
DOWNLOAD THESE "Guerilla Hood," "The Drummer," "Be My Girl"

THESE ARMS ARE SNAKES

OXENEERS OR THE LION SLEEPS WHEN THE ANTELOPE GO HOME ✪✪✪

JADE TREE

Punky Seattle threesome's wordily-titled, genre-stretching debut

Unlike other screamo acts, you can see brains when These Arms Are Snakes flip their lids. Stupid name notwithstanding, the Seattle three-some freak out thoughtfully, expounding on the lives of underpaid single mothers ("Angela's Secret") and "postmodern pigeons" ("Greetings From the Great North Woods") between Goth, keyboard-caressed breakdowns. "Angela's Secret" opens with a brawny synth line and Steve Snere's ghostly yowl, then flares into overdriven guitar licks and (what else?) unhinged screaming. At eight minutes, the surprisingly fleet "Gadget Arms" evokes classic prog, while "La Stanza Bianca" has a post-punk swagger – gently profiling residents of a mental ward. The band's got heart, too.
NICK CATUCCI
DOWNLOAD THESE "Angela's Secret," "La Stanza Bianca"

THE THRILLS

LET'S BOTTLE BOHEMIA ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Dublin pop classicists have grandeur fixation on overwrought second LP

Irish retro-rockers the Thrills, last heard paying scruffy homage to '60s and '70s West Coast pop on their 2003 debut *So Much for the City*, have decided to make Important Music – piano chords are stately, the string orchestration grandiose, the vocal mannerisms early Springsteenian, and the song titles ("The Curse of Comfort," "Found My Rosebud," "Faded Beauty Queens") reek of self-seriousness and poet-astery run amok. The band have a way with a tune, a knack for combining Motown's classic 4/4 thump with grinding guitars, and impeccable taste in string arrangers (two songs are scored by French ace Michel Colombier, another by legendary Beach Boys associate Van Dyke Parks). But the Thrills lack the skill and depth to summon real rock grandeur; the result is a strained, washed-out, sluggish record. Call it *Let's Bottle Anemia*.
JODY ROSEN
DOWNLOAD THIS "The Irish Keep Gate Crashing"

Clockwise from top left: Kenneth Cappello; Roger Moenks; Todd Selby/Retna Ltd.

VHS or BETA suck all the fun out of Twister.

SALLY TIMMS

IN THE WORLD OF HIM ✪✪✪

TOUCH AND GO

Frontwoman of the country-punk Mekons plays a man on her solo album

Call her the electronic horseman: Over spare, gothically glitching tracks, sharp-voiced Mekons chanteuse Sally Timms crawls under the skin of the male species, interpreting songs by boy pals Ryan Adams and country-noir croaker Johnny Dowd. From the wiry buzz of band mate Jon Langford's "Sentimental Marching Song" to her sudden sad wail in the chorus of Adams's "Fools We Are As Men," she plays jilt-er and jilt-ee with equal jagged ruefulness. Her weary resolve turns the Mekons' "Corporal Chalkie" into a creepy colonialist lament, and over creaking percussion on Mark Eitzel's "God's Eternal Love," she lends an air of futility to the curse "Your children are just pigs/They will roast." When, in the bleak waltz "High Dosage," she suggests "Look a bit closer and you will find out/Why a good man is so hard to find," you sense Timms has seen it all.

LAURA SINAGRA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Fools We Are As Men," "Corporal Chalkie"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

THE LATE GREAT DANIEL JOHNSTON: DISCOVERED, COVERED ✪✪✪✪

GAMMON

Beck, Death Cab for Cutie and friends drop by for tribute to a (certifiable) Texan oddball

Daniel Johnston's not dead, he's just a mess. A brilliant songwriter cursed with serious mental illness and a lisping whinny, he started selling homemade cassettes of his profound, grimly funny, pain-wracked songs in the early '80s; his biggest fans tend to be other musicians. By and large, the contributors here (assembled by Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous, who appears with his new side project Rabbit and the Flaming Lips) treat Johnston's halting, obsessive melodies to lavish pop arrangements – proving the sturdiness of the source material, while making it a bit easier to love. (There are a few other approaches, too, notably Thistle's raucous, Blondie-style "Love Not Dead" and Calvin Johnson's spookily low-tech "Sorry Entertainer.") For the uninitiated, a second disc includes Johnston's agonized original versions of all of these songs.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "King Kong" (Tom Waits), "Walking the Cow" (TV On the Radio)

VARIOUS ARTISTS

FUTURE SOUNDTRACK FOR AMERICA ✪✪✪

BARSUK/ MUSIC FOR AMERICA/ MOVEON.ORG

You hate Bush? I hate Bush! Liberal alt-rockers donate rare, unreleased and new tracks to compilation

When indie-rockers feel wronged, they don't get mad, they get moody. So, a large number of the acts here – fundraising for nonprofit groups that hope to send George W. Bush back to Texas – explore a plaintive kind of protest. Think Edwin Starr after some downers and a trip to Goodwill for cardigans. Wounded and wordy, Omaha's Bright Eyes turn in a nearly a cappella "Going For the Gold," punkers Blink-182 offer a ghostly mix of the teary "Miss You," and Elliott Smith's "A Distorted Reality Is Now a Necessity to Be Free" (the B-side of a single that the songwriter released shortly before he died) smolders with indignation. There are some great howls: Ben Kweller's "Jerry Falwell Destroyed Earth" is bristling and funny, while Karen O. of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs does her best Eric Cartman screech on a live "Date With the Night."

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE "A Distorted Reality Is Now a Necessity to Be Free" (Elliott Smith), "Jerry Falwell Destroyed Earth" (Ben Kweller), "This Temporary Life" (Death Cab for Cutie)

Paul Westerberg "totally aced" his CPA exam.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

WHAT IS HIP?: WARNER BROS. REMIXES VOL. 1 ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

Remixers awaken disgraced Me-Decade karaoke singalongs

Hip-hoppers and dance dudes rarely seize light '70s L.A. rock and crisp soul. Yes, Jay-Z embraced Broadway's *Annie* and Puff Daddy sampled disco Diana Ross, but the Doobie Brothers? Yet soft rock meets acute beats on *What Is Hip?*, a collection of cozy Warner Bros. tracks as legendary as Bugs Bunny. Songs range from America's "Ventura Highway" to Devo's "Whip It" (the odd nod to post-'70s energy). Re-toolers – such as Philip Steir (No Doubt, Moby) who performs cheese-free wonders on Seals & Croft's "Summer Breeze" and Todd Rundgren's "Hello It's Me" – don't reconstruct the tracks. Instead, they faithfully retain their comforting original shapes. With the well-known melodies and vocals intact, these remixers are not trying to glimpse unseen vistas of new music. They just reckon that amber oldies might rate white-hot new electronic treatments.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Lotta Love" (Nicholette Larson), "Rainy Night In Georgia" (Tony Joe White), "Midnight At the Oasis" (Maria Muldaur)

ASTONISHING FACT!

VHS OR BETA's Craig Pfunder was orphaned in South Korea in the '70s. The orphanage has since burned down and he has no idea exactly how old he is!

VHS OR BETA

NIGHT ON FIRE ✪✪✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

Louisville indie groove masters learn to sing, and find a heart

The piercing guitar lead and four-on-the-floor disco beat that open *Night On Fire* suggest that we're back in the groove of VHS or Beta's instrumental debut *Le Funk*, when – *boom* – Craig Pfunder starts to sing. And his plaintive, fake-Brit vocal explodes into an honest-to-God song that immediately transforms VHS or Beta from disco revivalists into one of rock's best new bands. Using a classic '90s indie lineup of guitar, bass and drums to play '80s dance music, they capture a sense of longing and heartbreak that has eluded their contemporaries; the Rapture and Liars sound lifeless and calculating next to the majesty of "The Melting Moon" or "Alive." At first, it may seem that Pfunder wants only to mimic the Cure's cracked nightclub warble, but he has his eye on more than mascara moves: he wants the epic longing of Echo & the Bunnymen and the Psychedelic Furs, and he gets it.

JACK HAYES

DOWNLOAD THESE "The Melting Moon," "Alive"

TOM WAITS

REAL GONE ✪✪✪✪

ANTI-/EPITAPH

The gravel-gargling troubadour returns to his storytelling heyday – and raps, too!

In the '70s, young Tom Waits penned Tin Pan Alley tales of derelicts and sad-luck dames. Now, at age 54, after a '90s spent chasing a dissonant, wildly experimental muse, Waits returns to spare storytelling. *Real Gone* isn't all throwback balladeering, though. In addition to moaning the bluegrass lament "Trampled Rose," Waits raps over turntable stutter on "Top of the Hill" and growls through the flag-waving mambo "Hoist That Rag," urged on by Mark Ribot's guitar stabs. The art-absorbed singer has gotten political, too. Beyond spitting trademark hooey about one-eyed ostrich trainers, he hints in "How's It Gonna End" at the horror-flick of current global unrest. The Celt-folk "Day After Tomorrow" imagines a doomed

soldier's letter home. And, in the jazzy creeper "Dead and Lovely," Waits's crack that a doomed girl's murderous beau was "not the kind of wheel you fall asleep at" doubles as a canny wake-up call.
LAURA SINAGRA
DOWNLOAD THESE "Top of the Hill," "Hoist That Rag"

BUTCH WALKER

LETTERS ✪✪✪

EPIC

Former Marvelous 3 frontman chucks skinny tie, checks into Hotel California

"I've gotta get out of Los Angeles," Butch Walker sings. After hearing his songs about traffic jams, "aging hipsters" in trucker hats and evenings spent "at the Standard in the bathroom doing coke," you start to understand why. Luckily, Walker is steeped in some nobler SoCal traditions, too — sunny songcraft and recording-studio professionalism — and the result is polished, melodic guitar rock that flaunts equal debts to Nick Lowe-style pop classicism and matchbox twenty-style radio cheese. *Letters* is backloaded with one too many stolid piano ballads, but mostly Walker sticks to the songwriting strengths honed during his tenure with neo–New Wavers Marvelous 3. He relies on time-tested hooks and trains a self-deprecating eye on the folkways of his almost-famous caste. "I wasted a good conversation about music and God/On an out-of-work, coked-up A&R guy," he laments on "Uncomfortably Numb." The Hollywood D-list has found its poet laureate.
JODY ROSEN
DOWNLOAD THESE "#1 Summer Jam," "Race Cars and Goth Rock"

PAUL WESTERBERG

FOLKER ✪

VAGRANT

Alt-rock icon coasts into middle age

Every Paul Westerberg solo album released since the Replacements broke up has been hailed as a return to form. The Replacements were one of the great underground bands of the '80s, combining the chaotic energy of hardcore punk with sophisticated songs of longing or comedy. Westerberg solo has been a disaster; his only halfway listenable album is *Mono*, which he treated with so little seriousness that he released it in 2001 under the alter-ego Grandpa-boy. *Folker* continues this sorry tradition, a poorly-recorded collection of lazily-written songs recorded by an artist whose muse deserted him long ago. "My Dad" and "$100 Groom" try to offer the kind of slice-of-life insight that made Westerberg a hero, but the music sounds like an afterthought. Worst of all is "Jingle (Buy It)," a minute-and-a-half-long cynical "joke" about needing to write a single. Buy a copy of the Replacements' *Let It Be* or *Tim* to find out what all the adoration was about, but stay far, far away from this.
JACK HAYES
DOWNLOAD THIS None

Butch Walker remembers he doesn't know how to drive.

GARY WILSON

MARY HAD BROWN HAIR ✪

STONES THROW

"Outsider" crooner, once praised in song by Beck, just sounds creepy

Gary Wilson's self-released 1977 album *You Think You Really Know Me* became a cult favorite among fans of "outsider" music: He was a creepy, croony one-man band, most of whose fake-soul songs were about the girls he drooled over from a distance — and his fantasies about making out with them. Following *You Think*'s reissue two years ago, he's made a follow-up of overwrought avant-lounge-lizard songs about — surprise! — the girls he's still drooling over who just wish that he'd go away and stop bugging them. It's fascinating as sociology, but sad and unnerving to listen to, and Wilson's suffocating and cheesy synthesizers are almost absolutely unbearable. An eccentric artifact, yes, but you can practically *hear* the sound of the restraining orders being typed up.
DOUGLAS WOLK
DOWNLOAD THIS None

BLENDER APPROVED

The best new releases of the last three months

THE LIBERTINES
THE LIBERTINES
ROUGH TRADE

Britain's junk-plagued answer to the Strokes pull it together long enough to record this thrilling document of a band spinning out of control.

JADAKISS
KISS OF DEATH
RUFF RYDERS/INTERSCOPE

With this inventive sophomore effort, the gritty-voiced former Ruff Ryder MC makes his bid to be New York's new hip-hop king.

DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS
THE DIRTY SOUTH
NEW WEST

Southern rock's greatest living band unveils the dark side of Dixie — poor, bleak and often deadly — on this slow-burning fifth album.

RAY CHARLES
GENIUS LOVES COMPANY
CONCORD

The late R&B legend bids the world farewell with 12 soulful duets; Willie Nelson, Norah Jones and more help send him off.

WINDSOR FOR THE DERBY

WE FIGHT TIL DEATH ✪✪✪

SECRETLY CANADIAN

Space-pop duo narrows their songs into a relentless series of dream-drones

It's taken them eight years to figure it out, but Windsor for the Derby's chief skill isn't conventional songwriting, it's building grooves. Most of the tracks here are constructed around a drone or a chord or two, propelled by a simple rhythm — the spacy *motorik* approach invented by Neu! in the early '70s. Guitarists Dan Matz and Jason McNeely, the band's only full-time members, let their subtle arrangements evolve over the course of each monomaniacal forward crawl, sometimes adding their dry, hypnotized-sounding voices to the mix. WFTD occasionally give in to the urge to crank up the fuzz and play straight-up indie-rock, but the narrower each song's scope is, the more it feels like it should go on forever.
DOUGLAS WOLK
DOWNLOAD THESE "For People Unknown," "Nightingale"

ABDEL WRIGHT

ABDEL WRIGHT ✪✪✪

WEAPONS OF MASS ENTERTAINMENT/ INTERSCOPE

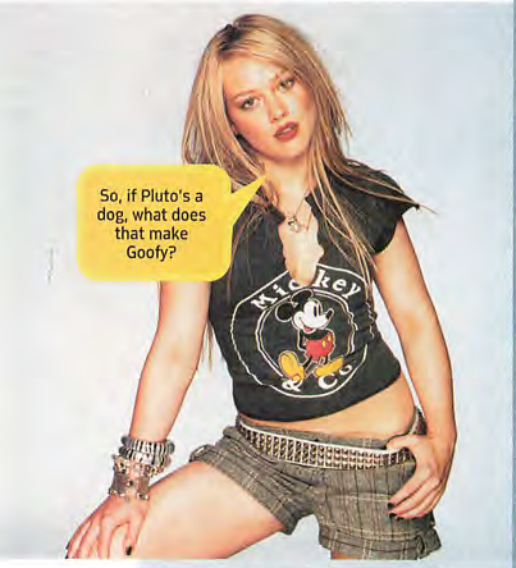
Jamaican singer-songwriter touted by U2's Bono

Smoke a spliff for every Jamaican artist touted as "the next Bob Marley" and you'd be higher than Marley ever was. Abdel Wright, the latest singer-songwriter to garner such hype — courtesy of Bono, who's recording with him — seems to fit the bill: Wright plays guitar (not to mention piano, flute, harmonica and drums), spits socially conscious lyrics and, yes, sports dreadlocks. But his musical formula of throaty patois verses and melodic pop choruses is closer to another reggae crossover success: Shaggy. On most tracks — especially the harmonica-tinged "Human Behavior," addressed to "pharmaceutical companies, cellular makers and toxic materializers" — this winning merger of coffeeshop crooner and dancehall don is conscious yet catchy. Eventually, the music becomes repetitive, the lyrics turn trite ("How long must we suffer?") and Wright's nasal voice toes the line between plaintive and whiny. But since the next Bob Marley is likely to arrive when the Messiah does, Wright has plenty of time to find fresher formulas and lyrics that really stir things up.
BAZ DREISINGER
DOWNLOAD THESE "Human Behavior," "My Decision"

Previous page, from left: Mick Rock; Miranda Penn Turin. This page: Alan Ferguson

THE 40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

This month, neither Pimp Juice nor pop-punk can best Hilary Duff's latest radio smash.



POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"FLY"	HILARY DUFF	*HILARY DUFF* BUENA VISTA/HOLLYWOOD
2	"PREDICTABLE"	GOOD CHARLOTTE	*CHRONICLES OF LIFE AND DEATH* EPIC
3	"MY PLACE"	NELLY FEAT. JAHEIM	*SUIT* FO'REEL/UNIVERSAL
4	"PIECES OF ME"	ASHLEE SIMPSON	*AUTOBIOGRAPHY* GEFFEN
5	"OPEN YOUR EYES"	ALTER BRIDGE	*ONE DAY REMAINS* WIND-UP
6	"HOW COME"	D12	*D12 WORLD* SHADY/INTERSCOPE
7	"HEAVEN"	LOS LONELY BOYS	*LOS LONELY BOYS* OR/EPIC
8	"ON FIRE"	LLOYD BANKS	*THE HUNGER FOR MORE* G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE
9	"MY BOO"	USHER FEAT. ALICIA KEYS	*CONFESSIONS* LAFACE
10	"AMERICAN IDIOT"	GREEN DAY	*AMERICAN IDIOT* REPRISE
11	"SOMEBODY TOLD ME"	THE KILLERS	*HOT FUSS* ISLAND
12	"MY HAPPY ENDING "	AVRIL LAVIGNE	*UNDER MY SKIN* ARISTA
13	"VITAMIN R (LEADING US ALONG)"	CHEVELLE	*THIS TYPE OF THINKING COULD DO US IN* EPIC
14	"TILT YA HEAD BACK"	NELLY	*SWEAT* FO'REEL/UNIVERSAL
15	"FLOAT ON"	MODEST MOUSE	*GOOD NEWS FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE BAD NEWS* EPIC
16	"A FAVOR HOUSE ATLANTIC"	COHEED AND CAMBRIA	*IN KEEPING SECRETS. . . .* EQUALVISION/COLUMBIA
17	"FALL TO PIECES"	VELVET REVOLVER	*CONTRABAND* RCA
18	"GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER"	PAPA ROACH	*GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER* DREAMWORKS
19	"TRIPLE TROUBLE"	BEASTIE BOYS	*TO THE 5 BOROUGHS* CAPITOL
20	"JUST LIKE YOU"	THREE DAYS GRACE	*THREE DAYS GRACE* JIVE
21	"TAKE ME OUT"	FRANZ FERDINAND	*FRANZ FERDINAND* EPIC
22	"LEAVE (GET OUT)"	JOJO	*JOJO* BLACKGROUND/UNIVERSAL
23	"SLOW HANDS"	INTERPOL	*ANTICS* MATADOR
24	"SHE WILL BE LOVED"	MAROON 5	*SONGS ABOUT JANE* OCTONE/J RECORDS
25	"1985"	BOWLING FOR SOUP	*A HANGOVER YOU DON'T DESERVE* JIVE
26	"ONLY ONE"	YELLOWCARD	*OCEAN AVENUE* CAPITOL
27	"TIME'S UP"	JADAKISS FEAT. NATE DOGG	*KISS OF DEATH* RUFF RYDERS/INTERSCOPE
28	"U SAVED ME "	R. KELLY	*HAPPY PEOPLE/U SAVED ME* JIVE
29	"SAME DIRECTION"	HOOBASTANK	*THE REASON* ISLAND
30	"THE JOKER"	FATBOY SLIM	*PALOOKAVILLE* ASTRALWERKS
31	"GOODIES"	CIARA	*GOODIES* LAFACE
32	"YOU HAD ME"	JOSS STONE	*MIND, BODY AND SOUL* S-CURVE
33	"BREAKING THE HABIT"	LINKIN PARK	*METEORA* WARNER BROS.
34	"I LIKE THAT"	HOUSTON FEAT. CHINGY, NATE DOGG	*IT'S ALREADY WRITTEN* CAPITOL
35	"SUNSHINE"	LIL' FLIP FEAT. LEA	*U GOTTA FEEL ME* SONY URBAN/SUICIA FREE/COLUMBIA
36	"BROKEN"	SEETHER	*DISCLAIMER* WIND-UP
37	"GOLDEN"	JILL SCOTT	*BEAUTIFULLY HUMAN* HIDDEN BEACH/EPIC
38	"LET'S GET IT STARTED"	THE BLACK EYED PEAS	*ELEPHUNK* A&M
39	"MEANT TO LIVE"	SWITCHFOOT	*THE BEAUTIFUL LETDOWN* RED INK/COLUMBIA
40	"IF I AIN'T GOT YOU"	ALICIA KEYS	*THE DIARY OF ALICIA KEYS* J RECORDS

1 HILARY DUFF

"FLY"

HILARY DUFF

The *Blender* cover cutie has sold close to four million copies of her debut, *Metamorphosi* – and now she's back with her most theatrical single yet. Fresh from selling out her Most Wanted summer tour, she heads to Asia and Australia for gigs next month. You can catch her October 2 on Nickolodeon's *Let's Just Play*.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

2 GOOD CHARLOTTE

"PREDICTABLE"

CHRONICLES OF LIFE AND DEATH

Denying Duff romance rumors (Joel and Hilary are just friends, OK?), the Maryland punk nice-guys are back with their third release. They headlined the Vans Warped Tour this summer. On October 5, their *Live at Brixton Academy* DVD is out and they'll appear on *Conan O'Brien*.

11 THE KILLERS

"SOMEBODY TOLD ME"

HOT FUSS

The Las Vegas-based new-wave revivalists, riding their metrosexually correct hit video "Somebody Told Me," tour Florida, Georgia and North Carolina before heading up to Philly, D.C. and New York in October. On December 2, they'll get to make goo-goo eyes with Mischa Barton when they appear on *The O.C.*

23 INTERPOL

"SLOW HANDS"

ANTICS

New York City's nattiest gloom-team follow their smash indie debut with this modern-rock hit. Fresh off their slot on the Cure's mope-rock Curiosa tour, they kick off their own road show on October 28. They'll bring their new-wave misery to Jay Leno's door on October 1.

THE 10 MOST POPULAR RING TONES IN AMERICA

Who's putting the bling-bling into your ring-ring? Usher, OutKast and D12!

1	"CONFESSIONS, PART II"	USHER
2	"ROSES"	OUTKAST
3	"MY BAND"	D12
4	"LOCKED UP"	AKON
5	"FREEK-A-LEEK"	PETEY PABLO
6	"SO SEXY"	TWISTA
7	"SUNSHINE"	LIL' FLIP FEAT. LEA
8	"LEAVE (GET OUT)"	JOJO
9	"MOVE YA BODY"	NINA SKY
10	"JESUS WALKS"	KANYE WEST

SOURCE: VIRGIN MOBILE

Clockwise from left: Danielle Levitt; Erin Patrice O'Brien/Corbis Outline; Jelle Wagenaar; Pieter Van Hattem

virginmobileusa.com
"Cell phone contracts. Avoid them like shellfish."
Pay As You Go by
Virgin mobile
Live without a plan.

"I know it's music my mom likes..."

Would you believe the overgrown fratboy host of *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and prank-call show *Crank Yankers* loves the soothing sounds of James Taylor and Neil Diamond?

BY PAUL SEMEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

THE CD I TOTALLY MISINTERPRETED AS A KID

THE CLASH
COMBAT ROCK
EPIC, 1982

"Familiar story: I heard 'Rock the Casbah' on the radio. It made the biggest impression on a teenage me. I listened to guys who looked like Huey Lewis back then, so when I saw what the Clash looked like, their mohawks, I felt very cool about myself. But I didn't know they were political until *you* asked me about it. I didn't know what they were talking about. I thought they were singing 'Fuck the Casbah,' which was part of the appeal."

THE CD THAT MAKES ME FEEL ROMANTIC

HUEY LEWIS AND THE NEWS
PICTURE THIS
CAPITOL, 1982

"My bandleader, Cleto, who's been my best friend since I was 9 years old, broke into a boat and [grabbed] a bunch of cassettes, and Huey Lewis's *Sports* was one of them. I liked it, so we got his previous one, *Picture This*, which has what just might be my favorite song of all time, 'Do You Believe in Love.' "

THE CD THAT BRINGS OUT THE STALKER IN ME

ELVIS COSTELLO
MY AIM IS TRUE
COLUMBIA, 1977

"This might be my favorite album, though I have an affinity for the first album I hear from someone, so right up there is *Punch the Clock*. We've been trying to get Elvis Costello for the show, but he's been very difficult. I heard that he didn't like *The Man Show* and that's why, but I can't imagine Elvis Costello even seeing *The Man Show*."

THE CD FOR PRETENDING TO BE A GANGSTA

DR. DRE
THE CHRONIC
DEATH ROW/INTERSCOPE, 1992

"Growing up as a black teenager in Long Beach, I, of course, took to this album. My love of this album started with Snoop. I just loved the sound of his voice. I even used to do an imitation of him when I was on the radio, but all I'd say was, 'Y'know what I'm sayin'?' He just seemed so dangerous. Now he seems so loveable, but back then it seemed like if you told him you liked one of his songs, he'd kill you. I like that."

THE CD THAT MAKES ME SOUND LIKE A DICK

SNOOP DOGGY DOGG
DOGGYSTYLE
DEATH ROW/INTERSCOPE, 1993

"He may be the best cohost we've ever had. He really likes to fuck around. Growing up with the Fat Boys, the Fresh Prince and Young M.C., I had never heard anything like this before. But one thing I didn't like was that he was promoting the word 'jimmy' as a synonym for 'penis,' and that's something I've been trying to stop for years. I don't want to be the dick of this generation."

THE CD THAT MAKES ME FEEL "SPECIAL"

EMINEM
THE MARSHALL MATHERS LP
SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE, 2000

"We got him on *Crank Yankers* – he was such a big fan of the show that he had his people ask if he could be on. Which was crazy for me, because I really love him. Actually, the shit he wanted to do was much stronger than what we do. He's got a retarded character who's seriously retarded, much worse than Special Ed. [His character is] real-sounding. 'Uh, we need to lighten it up a bit.' "

THE CD THAT MAKES ME SPANK THE MONKEY

MADONNA
MADONNA
SIRE, 1983

"I thought Madonna was black when I heard 'Holiday,' so I was shocked when I first saw her in the 'Borderline' video. I was really in love with her throughout high school, and have probably masturbated to her more than any other famous woman. I think her appearance had a lot to do with how much I liked the album, to be honest with you. When you're a 16-year-old virgin, Madonna is a real thrill. I'd still do her. Gladly."

THE CD THAT RECALLS MY CRIMINAL PAST

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
BORN TO RUN
COLUMBIA, 1975

"I got into Bruce in '85 when a friend stole a copy of *Born In the U.S.A.* from the record store he worked at and sold it to me for $5. All I knew of him was that Rick Springfield song, 'They Call Me Bruce,' but after getting *U.S.A.*, I went back and got his older albums. Now, it's Internet theft, but back then we did it the old-fashion way: shoplifting. I like every Bruce album, but if I have to pick one, I'd pick *Born to Run*."

THE CD THAT I (AND OTHERS) SECRETLY LOVE

NEIL DIAMOND
THE GREATEST HITS: 1966-1992
COLUMBIA, 1992

"I love Neil Diamond, and I think there's a secret undercurrent of people who also love him. The song that tickles me the most is 'Heartlight.' Neil went and saw *E.T.* and was so excited that he wrote this song. That is one of the goofiest things you could imagine an adult doing. When I was a kid, I saw *The Warriors* and came out wanting to be in a gang. He saw *E.T.* and came out wanting to sing about it."

THE CD I THINK IS ABOUT ME

JAMES TAYLOR
LIVE
COLUMBIA, 1993

"He just has the most pleasant voice of anybody. I know it's music my mom likes, which always makes me worry, but I love James Taylor. Did he know he wrote 'Sweet Baby James' for me? It's true. I even like his new albums. That's how I started: I bought *That's Why I'm Here* in 1985, and went backward."

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Styling: Rodney Muñoz; grooming: Suzy Pannenbacker

Top of the World

Goodbye, bondage pants and gobbing. Hello, superstardom.

THE CLASH
LONDON CALLING: 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

"Wait, I thought *you* were singing this one."

THE LAST GREAT rock & roll album of the '70s was released on December 14, 1979, but it had little to do with the decade ahead, and everything to do with the one that preceded it.

In 1976, the Clash had come together in London's punk-rock scene, ostensibly sharing the music's stated aim to "destroy rock & roll" and even promising "no Elvis, Beatles and Rolling Stones in 1977" on their most punk song. But the Clash soon revealed themselves to be romantics rather than nihilists — in love rather than at war with the mythology of rock — and when they gathered at London's Wessex Studios in August 1979 to record their third album, it turned into a joyful and commanding encapsulation of their influences.

This bulky three-disc package, which includes a bonus CD of alternate versions of their hits and a documentary DVD, captures rock fusion in progress. Before the rebirth that occurred when he saw the Sex Pistols' first London shows, main man Joe Strummer had fronted a scorched-earth R&B cover band called the 101ers, while skinny lead-guitarist Mick Jones obsessed about the Rolling Stones. Embracing these aspects of their former selves, the duo realized the perfect marriage of punk and punk's predecessors: the defiantly retro (a twangy cover of "Brand New Cadillac," by pre-Beatles quiffster Vince Taylor, was the first song they finished) and the madly futurist (the ghostly, relentless reggae-rock of the title track). In the startling opening gambit of "Clampdown," Strummer nails the punk dilemma in seven syllables — "What are we gonna do now?" — and spends the rest of the record coming up with plausible answers to the question.

Teamwork learned on the soccer field (they played an hour a day, every day, during the demo sessions in June) blossomed on the final cut. Bassist Paul Simonon, the band's craggy pinup (but also the least musically confident member), was goaded into singing his dub-reggae doodle "The Guns of Brixton," and delivered it with a Neanderthal swagger. With "Lost In the Supermarket," Strummer conjured soulful pop about lead-guitarist Mick Jones's inauspicious childhood — "The kids in the halls and the pipes in the walls/Make me noises for company" — which Jones sang with a vulnerable wobble. Meanwhile, drummer Nicky "Topper" Headon was thrown stylistic challenges — ska, Spector, Springsteen, rockabilly, R&B, the Rolling Stones — and rose to each with an original, nervy intensity.

It was a big step forward for the Clash, a giant leap for punk. Strummer delivers his songs of gamblers, outlaws, doomed actors and drug addicts with a soul man's gusto, and the performances retain a we-just-made-this-up immediacy. Credit is shared by veteran producer Guy Stevens, a 24-carat dingbat whose idea of creating an appropriate recording vibe was to throw chairs at the band, wrestle on the floor with the engineer and shout "Jerry Lee Lewis! Aaaaaaaargh!" into the ear of Joe Strummer when he was trying to sing.

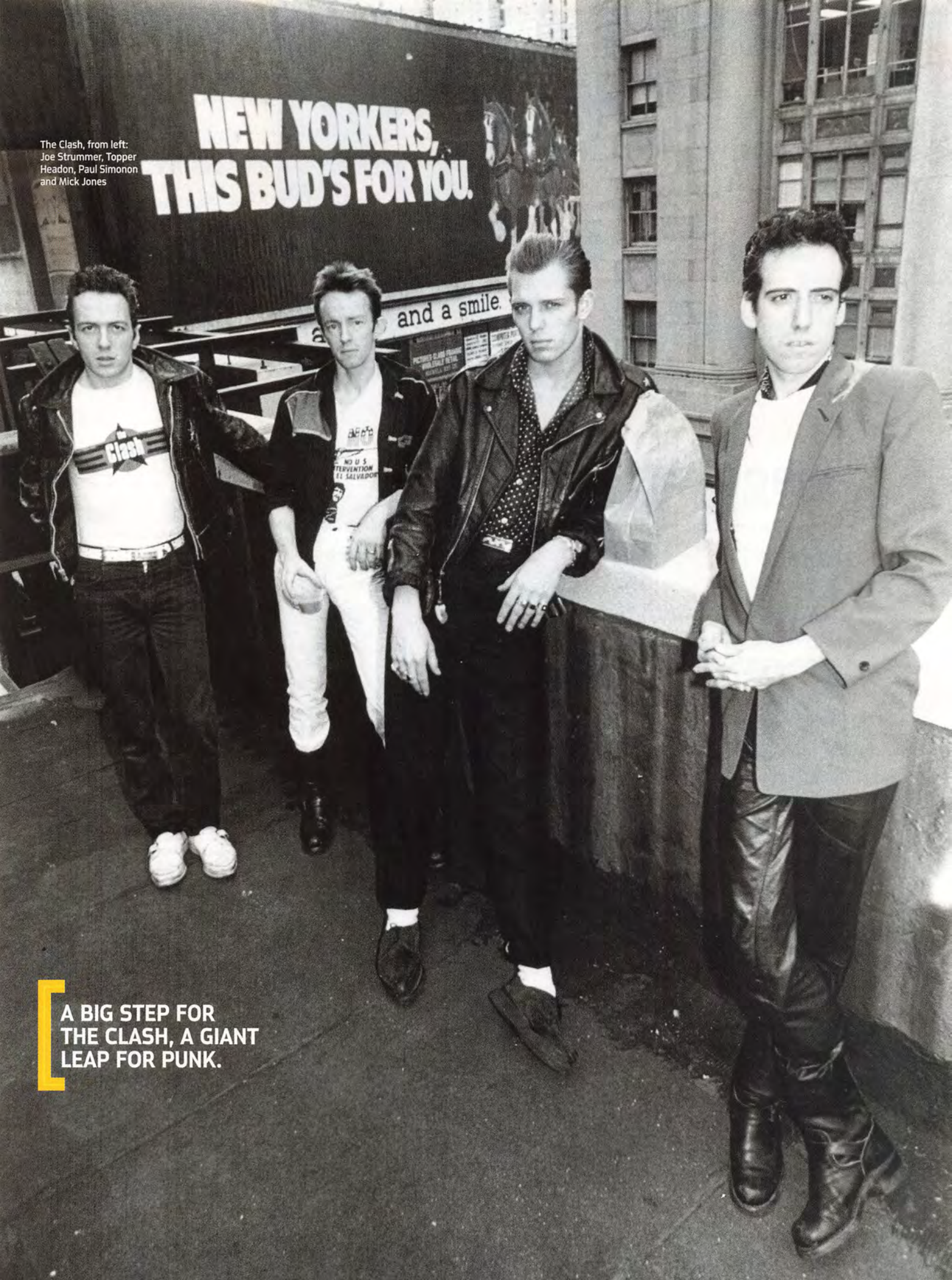
Stevens's antics, caught in seconds of blurred black-and-white footage on the bonus DVD, are the unexpected highlights of this $30-odd anniversary edition. The documentary, with interview footage culled from the superior and widely available *Westway To the World* DVD, is otherwise superfluous. And the demo versions on the *Vanilla Tapes* CD sound like an incompetent Clash cover band rehearsing in a sock. "London Calling" was originally slower; "Paul's Tune" (aka "The Guns of Brixton") was originally useless. In other words, if you're considering buying this glorious record for the first time, save 20 bucks and go for the basic version.

Twenty-five years later, *London Calling* needs no updating and enhancing. It's all there on "Death or Glory," a roughneck singalong (perfect with booze) that accepts the inevitability of sellout and decline ("He who fucks nuns will later join the church") even as it rages with riffing abandon against the dying of the light. Punk was dead, but it didn't matter, because rock & roll had never sounded healthier.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THESE "London Calling," "Death or Glory," "Clampdown," "Train In Vain"

This page: Pennie Smith. Opposite page: Laura Levine



The Clash, from left: Joe Strummer, Topper Headon, Paul Simonon and Mick Jones

A BIG STEP FOR THE CLASH, A GIANT LEAP FOR PUNK.

The Kinks celebrate another bankrupted hairdresser.

Shaggy Stories

The Kinks' '70s output suffered after Ray Davies's nervous breakdown, but not why you'd think!

THE KINKS

MUSWELL HILLBILLIES ✪✪✪✪✪

PRESERVATION: ACT 1 ✪✪✪✪

PRESERVATION: ACT 2 ✪✪✪

SCHOOLBOYS IN DISGRACE ✪✪✪

MISFITS ✪✪✪

ONE FOR THE ROAD ✪✪✪✪

GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT ✪✪

WORD OF MOUTH ✪

STATE OF CONFUSION ✪✪

KOCH

MOPERS AND SARCASTIC bastards abound in pop, but music that really makes you itch is rare. So it's good to return to the Kinks, who mined social discomfort with a mix of brains, balls and bile. They have many disciples, from the Hives to Franz Ferdinand. But most steal only the easiest jokes from Kinks wit Ray Davies's bag of tricks.

Unlike the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, the Kinks were too willful to become pop icons. Their hits, from the early garage blare of "You Really Got Me" to the camp balladry of "Lola," only hint at Davies's epic theater of song, which escalates on their early-'70s concept albums — comic dramas that roil with life and chaos as Davies moved toward more dangerous mind games.

The Kinks began the '70s at a high point, signing a million-dollar contract with RCA and releasing the nearly perfect *Muswell Hillbillies*. An MRI of the English psyche that's also a slap at American cultural imperialism and a jab at the often put-on rootsiness of '60s folk-rock, *Hillbillies* is easy to enjoy but hard to absorb, with glimpses of Englishness that are both silly and moving. The most satisfying actualization of Davies's ambitions, *Hillbillies* still has much to say about the consumerism-addled suburban dream.

COMIC DRAMAS THAT ROIL WITH LIFE AND CHAOS.

He went even farther in *Preservation: Act 1* and *Act 2*, sprawling comedies of class, mass media and Faustian devilry released in 1973 and 1974. Highly uneven, yet fascinating in their raucous twistedness, they deserve the patience these remastered versions invite.

Both tanked commercially, and Davies suffered one of his many nervous breakdowns. The Kinks became less crazy, less fun. *Schoolboys in Disgrace*, a *Preservation* prequel that sounds like *Monty Python* doing Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, disdains grand experiments.

Then a funny thing happened: The Kinks became stars again. Ray Davies gave the band's new label, Arista, monster hits that were clever and emotional but free of the incongruities that enrich his thornier work. This new accessibility and constant touring (captured on the triumphant live disc *One for the Road*) brought the Kinks a new audience that Ray, at least, wasn't quite sure he liked.

Misfits epitomizes this bittersweet transition. The Kinks hadn't been this forceful since its '60s garage days: guitarist brother Dave Davies grandstands without being pompous. But Ray's songs, still neatly affecting, lack that old, odd edge. *Misfits* would be great by any other band; from the Kinks, it lacks fizz.

The three albums concluding this round of reissues have their moments, and their hits — "Destroyer," "Come Dancing," "Do it Again" — will spark memories for many casual listeners. But they're not the place to start with this most rewardingly perplexing band. Stick with *Muswell Hillbillies*, dip into *Preservation* if you dare, and let Ray Davies get your mind into a twist.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Oklahoma U.S.A.," "Sweet Lady Genevieve," "Education," "Celluloid Heroes" (Live), "Destroyer"

THE SCORE »

✪✪✪✪✪ EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

✪✪✪✪ GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

✪✪✪ GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪ JUST OK

✪ WEAK

BLONDIE

SINGLES BOX ✪✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Iconic NYC new wave repackaged in an awkward new form

Pick a song here, and chances are you can find it on *The Platinum Collection* and *Blonde and Beyond*. Unless you've been hunting for the rare extended version of "Warchild," the appeal here is in the packaging: Each of these 15 singles, released in the U.K. between 1977 and 1982, comes in an individual sleeve with original cover art. While it's impossible not to get a kick out of Debbie Harry's various guises — in front of a mushroom cloud on "Atomic," in an ill-advised fedora and sunglasses on "Dreaming," licking vinyl on "Picture This" — the *Singles Box* is frustrating. "One Way or Another" is mysteriously omitted, and the liner notes lack any kind of clear chronology with original release dates. And, should you wish to listen to the songs consecutively, you'll have to plop down the cash on a squillion-loading CD player. It sure does look nice on the shelf, though.

APRIL LONG

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Call Me" (Spanish version), "Heart of Glass" (12" version), "Live It Up"

JAMES BROWN

SOUL ON TOP ✪✪✪

VERVE

The Godfather of Soul goes Vegas, with a big band

FUNK WEARS A TUX

Being the master of hard funk wasn't enough for James Brown; in the late '60s, he wanted very badly to become a Frank Sinatra-style crooner, too. He recorded *Soul on Top* with big-band big-timers Oliver Nelson and the Louie Bellson Orchestra in 1969 a few weeks before his public attempt to become a lounge lizard in Las Vegas. The album finds him attempting to

Debbie Harry of Blondie: $5 says you can't explain the name of her band.

James Brown: Godfather of Soul, purveyor of antiques.

take on hilariously inappropriate standards (Doris Day's "It's Magic") and remaking a couple of his own major hits with leisure-suited arrangements. But Brown was at the peak of his power as a song stylist (he could turn anything into a James Brown song – by *force*, if necessary) and no matter how heavy the kitsch gets, he manages to rasp the Rat Pack repertoire with conviction.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Your Cheatin' Heart," "It's a Man's, Man's, Man's World"

I LOVE THIS CD!

ROY JONES JR.
BOXER

SCARFACE
THE FIX
DEF JAM SOUTH/UNIVERSAL

"He's always got something you can relate to in real life. He's never ceased to amaze me with the way he puts his life into his music."

LENNY BRUCE

LET THE BUYER BEWARE

★★★★

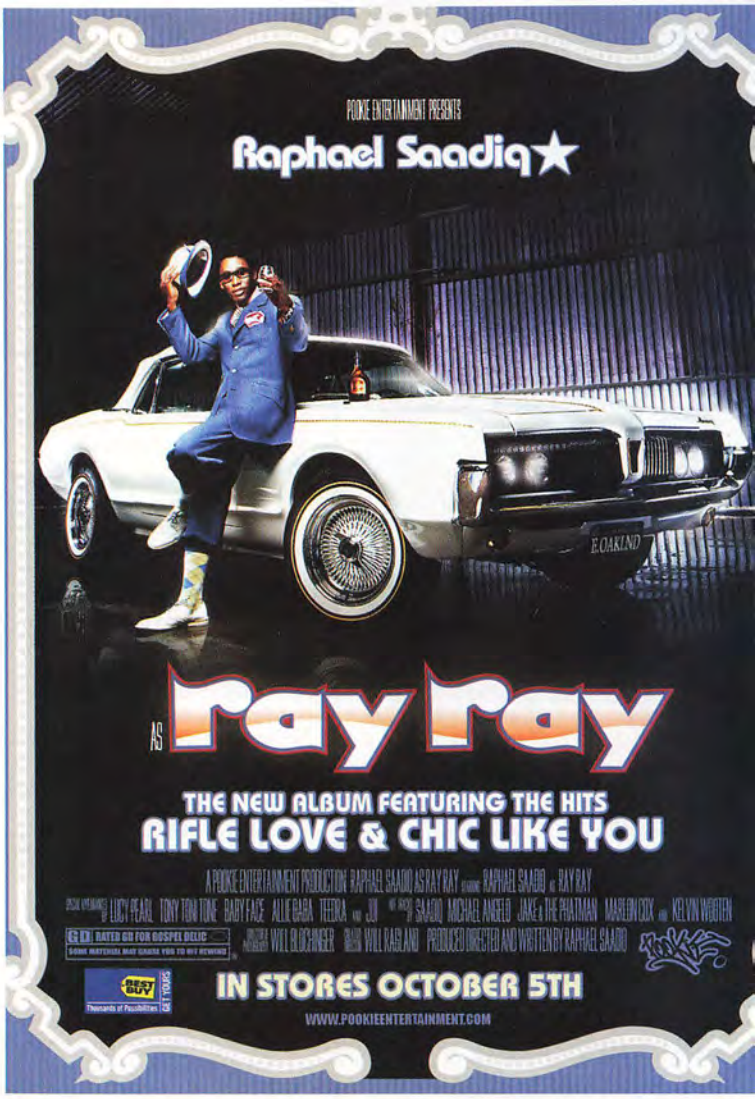
SHOUT! FACTORY

The "white Richard Pryor" or "post-war Howard Stern" – whatever you call him, he made swearing cool

The Federal Communications Commission threatens to shut down stations that let Howard Stern utter naughty words on the air. Meanwhile, Dick Cheney says "fuck" on the Senate floor, and won't apologize. Hypocrisy? You bet. If the revolutionary comedian Lenny Bruce hadn't died in 1966, this would without a doubt be his kind of year. Bruce's compulsion to question authority – be it the government, the press or organized religion – got his ass repeatedly thrown in jail for obscenity. But his comedy had an intellectual edge, too, which made it more dangerous than mere scatology. ("Eat, Sleep & Crap" is that very rare thing: a funny treatise on legal theory.) His performances, combining needle-sharp satire with the improvisatory energy of hard-bop jazz, were the spoken-word version of everything subversive punk would ever claim to be. Little of the material on this six-CD set still has the power to shock; what's shocking is how shocking Bruce was considered *back then*. In 1963 – in San Francisco, yet – jokes about racial stereotyping that would be considered mild today were enough to make audience gasp. American culture was much tamer until Bruce unleashed its id.

STEVE BODOW

DOWNLOAD THESE: "How to Relax Your Colored Friends At Parties," "Eat, Sleep & Crap" ➔



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HBO VIDEO

JAMES CHANCE

JAMES CHANCE & THE CONTORTIONS: BUY ✪✪✪

JAMES WHITE AND THE BLACKS: OFF WHITE ✪✪✪✪

ZE

Chaos-made NYC funk: deliberately irritating but brutally groovy

FUNKY NONSENSE

The Contortions were the band that late-'70s New York hipsters danced to: funky, for sure (frontman James Chance idolized James Brown), but also violently abrasive, atonal and often bluntly ugly. *Buy*, their 1979 first album, is a set of twitching, spitting travesties of Brown, with Chance's yawps and rat-killer saxophone backed up by a crack band (check out Adele Bertei's two-fisted organ technique). It's one-dimensional and brittle, but mighty forceful. James White's *Off White* — same year, same band, different name — finds them discovering disco, addressing (and pissing all over) the racial politics of musical style, and borrowing Chance's ex-bandmate, the yowling id-beast Lydia Lunch, to make hilarious sex noises on "Stained Sheets." The reissue includes the essential holiday freak-out "Christmas with Satan."

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Design to Kill," "Throw Me Away," "Contort Yourself," "Stained Sheets"

DAVID ALLAN COE

THE ESSENTIAL DAVID ALLAN COE ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

The best of a checkered, notorious honky-tonk life

David Allan Coe's most consistent talents in a 35-year career have been for chest-beating and shrewdly promoting himself and his more famous hard-country brethren. The ex-con prefigured hip-hop in the mid-'70s, giving obsessive big-ups to his pals in songs like "Willie, Waylon and Me" and "You Never Even Called Me By My Name." Almost coincidentally, Coe could be a wonderful songwriter, claiming such a sturdy, King-James hold of English in the horny "Would You Lay With Me (In a Field of Stone)" that it sounded like a century-old folk song. This collection has the sturdiest of his work, minus the "X-rated" woman/black/gay-baiting albums he made throughout the 1980s and still sells online, if you're willing to search for them.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Would You Lay With Me (In a Field of Stone)", "You Never Even Called Me By My Name"

Elvis Costello regrets having the shrimp vindaloo

ELVIS COSTELLO

ALMOST BLUE ✪✪✪✪

GOODBYE CRUEL WORLD ✪✪

KOJAK VARIETY ✪✪

RHINO

Canny chameleon finds new settings for his barbed words

"Warning: This album may be harmful to narrow minds," read a sticker on the sleeve to 1981's *Almost Blue*. Coming as Elvis Costello's fans were still digging the post-punk soul blast of the excellent *Get Happy!!*, it was a singularly downbeat collection of country standards (George Jones, Gram Parsons's haunting "I'm Your Toy," Hank Williams). Recorded by Nashville institution Billy Sherrill, driven by personal problems and drenched in alcohol, it's a brave stab at bridging genres years before alt-country became acceptable. *Goodbye Cruel World*, recorded in 1984 with longtime band the Attractions, suffers from a rare Costello problem: great lyrics (particularly the searing anti-Reagan protest "Peace In Our Time") but mushy production by Langer & Winstanley, who'd done wonders with cheeky Cockney ska chappies Madness. Even the immodest Costello calls it his "worst album." *Kojak Variety* is a light-hearted run through pop covers — the Supremes, an embarrassing reading of Ray Davies' "Days," Randy Newman — recorded in two weeks around the same time as 1989's *Spike*, but unreleased until 1995. It could have waited even longer.

EVERETT TRUE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Good Year For the Roses," "Peace In Our Time"

EBONY RHYTHM BAND

SOUL HEART TRANSPLANT: THE LAMP SESSIONS ✪✪✪✪

NOW AGAIN/STONES THROW

Long-forgotten funkateers who were huge in 1969, though only in Indianapolis

In the world of rare funk, every luckless, long-forgotten band was a should-have-been. At first, this collection highlighting Indianapolis' Ebony Rhythm Band seems no different: Their formula — swirling

BURIED TREASURE
UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS

RITES OF SPRING

RITES OF SPRING ✪✪✪

DISCHORD, 1985

Rites of Spring *hate* scavenger hunts!

Before there was Dashboard Confessional, Bright Eyes or Thursday, before emo had its own department at the Gap, it was a tiny Washington, D.C., rock movement, and Rites of Spring were its weeping kings. Frontman Guy Picciotto (who, like drummer Brendan Canty, was later in Fugazi) cried onstage to encourage the audience to get in touch with their emotions. Their only album is crude but effective, with Picciotto howling his heart out and the band rocking like their cruelty-free shoes were on fire.

DOUGLAS WOLK

Top to bottom: Steve Wood/Rex Features, Tomas Squip

organs, scratchy guitars, loping bass-lines and a hint of psychedelica – was unremarkable, and their repertoire was heavy on covers. The key was drumming-dynamo Matthew "Phatback" Watson's fierce back-beats. Watson turns a nondescript cover of the Doors' "Light My Fire" into a gloriously chaotic percussive workout, while his sloppy, stuttering rhythm is the perfect foil for the cool organ groove of "Soul Heart Transplant." A twist on the adage of giving the drummer some, these guys knew to let Watson have as much as he wanted.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Light My Fire," "Soul Heart Transplant"

BRYAN FERRY AND ROXY MUSIC

THE PLATINUM COLLECTION ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

English art-happening's triple "greatest hits" loses it in the last reel

Bryan Ferry's career is an object lesson in how *bad* good taste can be. At their inception in 1971, Roxy Music were a kitschy and brilliant art-pop explosion that resembled Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem from *The Muppet Show*. They hotwired soul and progressive rock to the decadent currents of European film and fashion, creating impossibly sexy pop hits, setting a never-bettered template for art-rock bands and never fearing a skronky sax solo. But over the years, Ferry sought respectability, dispensing with the coifs and the leopard skin. By the mid-'80s his music was tasteful, expensively crafted, and utterly sterile – an epitome of the decade. Though this pompously titled triple CD pushes the sketchy notion that Ferry effectively *was* Roxy, the ears indicate otherwise. Disc one is Roxy in the glory of their madness – "Pyjamarama," "Do the Strand," "Street Life" – and the second disc mingles their frosty Europop with his last decent solo work. The third disc is all Ferry: It's uptight, self-regarding and – excepting "Slave to Love" – pretty useless. Still, he *does* know how to wear a suit.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Virginia Plain," "Pyjamarama," "Angel Eyes," "Over You"

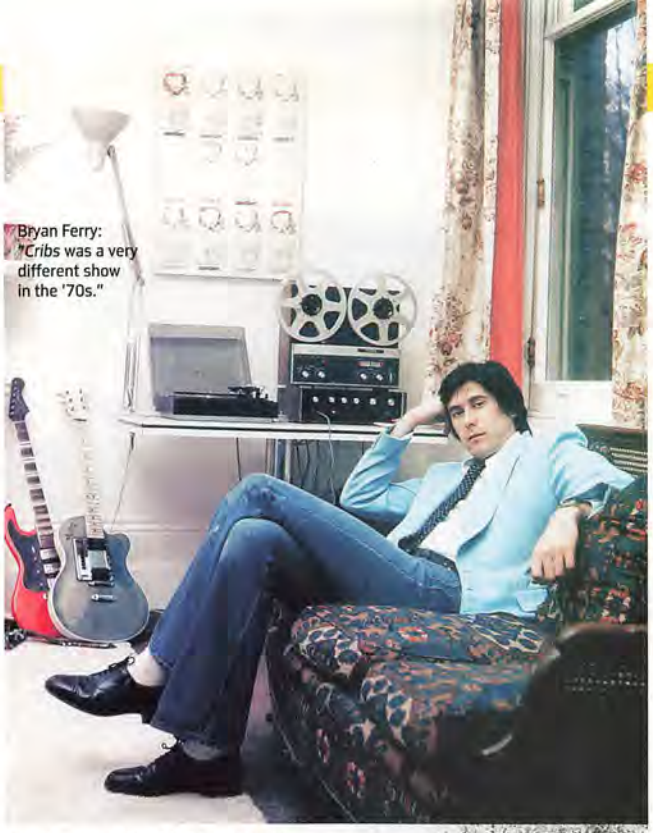
BOBBY FULLER FOUR

THE BEST OF THE BOBBY FULLER FOUR ✪✪✪✪✪

DEL-FI/RHINO

Rockabilly, surf, Merseybeat and garage rock melded with mystical perfection

Except for John Lennon, no mid-'60s singer sounded so in love with the possibilities of rock & roll – and so



Bryan Ferry: "*Cribs* was a very different show in the '70s."

intent upon giving it back the joy it had given him – as Bobby Fuller. In under two years, he made a series of remarkable recordings that combined Buddy Holly sweetness and garage-guitar grind, Phil Spectoresque teen angst and tribal surf rhythms. He died under mysterious circumstances in July 1966, his potential barely tapped. These 12 tracks (plus a goofy radio promo) are a nonstop revelation. "Don't Ever Let Me Know" crams epic romance into two minutes and 22 seconds; "Phantom Dragster" is B-movie fodder played with A-list abandon. And "I Fought the Law," famously covered by the Clash, is a Rosetta Stone. Its exuberance, rebelliousness and insistent backbeat say nearly everything there is to say about rock & roll.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "I Fought the Law," "Another Sad and Lonely Night," "Julie"

MERLE HAGGARD

THE ESSENTIAL MERLE HAGGARD ✪✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

In country music's worst decade, the Okie from Muskogee never slacked

Merle Haggard is the indomitable guardian of country tradition: a slit-eyed singer-songwriter with a massive catalogue of hard-luck anthems and a voice that slides effortlessly from honky-tonk rugged to plushness worthy of Nat King Cole. Haggard will be remembered for his remarkable string of '60s Capitol Records albums, but as this collection proves, he was terrific even in the '80s, not a golden age for traditional country. "Are the Good Times Really Over" and "Someday When Things Are Good" are pedal-steel-tinged weepers in the classic

The Bobby Fuller Four's *Star Trek* guest spot.

Haggard mode, and the duets with Willie Nelson and George Jones are irresistible. What impresses throughout is the humanism: At a time when the pop charts were dominated by sub-Springsteen Regular Joes, Haggard offered songs of working-class hardship and struggle without a hint of kitsch – genuine heartland rock, from a son of Muskogee, Oklahoma.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Big City," "Are the Good Times Really Over (I Wish a Buck Was Still Silver)," "Pancho and Lefty"

I LOVE THIS CD!

RACHEL McADAMS
ACTRESS IN MEAN GIRLS, THE NOTEBOOK

DESPAPARECIDOS
READ MUSIC/SPEAK SPANISH
SADDLE CREEK

"It's Conor Oberst from Bright Eyes. He has such intense emotion in his voice, but it's also hard and punky."

SAMMY HAGAR

THE ESSENTIAL RED COLLECTION ✪

HIP-O

Thirty years of mediocrity from the Cali-rock bozo

If nothing else, this 20-track overview of lunk-headed hard rock proves definitively that Sammy Hagar has mastered the art of party anthems that just aren't fun. The sometime Van Halen singer sums up his three-decade solo career in the 1981 track "There's Only One Way to Rock," because, well, it's clear he only *knows* one way to rock. The formula's simple: Shriek like a banshee; sing solely about girls, partying and cars (that part's not so bad); and deliver dubiously badass lyrics – "One foot on the brake, and one on the gas, there's too much traffic, I can't pass," from 1984's "I Can't Drive 55" – with a sledge-hammer's disregard for subtlety. Hagar even brazenly shills for his own Cabo Wabo tequila on 1999's "Mas Tequila." There's something inherently screwy when your nickname ("The Red Rocker") and your brand of booze are better known than any song you've created.

ERIK HIMMELSBACH

DOWNLOAD THIS: None

HAROLD MELVIN & THE BLUENOTES

THE ESSENTIAL HAROLD MELVIN & THE BLUENOTES ✪✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

Manly voiced Philly soul group worried about the world, their girlfriends – not in that order

Teddy Pendergrass was the dominant black male sex symbol of the late '70s before a severe auto accident left him using a wheelchair. But Pendergrass had already done his best work as lead singer for Harold Melvin & the Bluenotes from 1972 to 1975, where his gritty, gospel exhortations could be heard on epic love songs ("If You Don't Know Me By Now," "I Miss You") and social commentaries ("Bad Luck," "Wake Up Everybody"). Under the production guidance of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, and pushed by the remarkable MFSB rhythm section, Pendergrass, Melvin and the rest of the Bluenotes projected a hard-earned, very adult masculinity that's a world away from the adolescent R&B of today. These 14 songs are steeped not just in old-school arrangements but also in their traditional values of fellowship and love.

NELSON GEORGE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Wake Up Everybody," "The Love I Lost," "If You Don't Me By Now" ➔

Top to bottom: Rex Features, Michael Ochs Archives, Grayson Alexander/Retna Ltd.

THE ROLLING STONES

JUMP BACK: THE BEST OF THE ROLLING STONES, '71–'93 ✪✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Even well-crafted hits can't disguise the decline of "the world's greatest rock & roll band"

HEY! THESE GUYS WERE GOOD!

While the Stones' '60s catalog has recently undergone extensive audio upgrades, little has been done with the band's later work since it was digitally restored in 1993, when this set was originally released in Europe. With nothing new added to the sound, it has only the song selection to recommend it, which, apart from "Bitch," sticks close to chart successes with only one major omission – "Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo (Heart-breaker)." Contrary to the title, it ignores the '90s, but the slow slide away from relevance began much earlier, as the writing moved from blues basics ("Brown Sugar," "Tumbling Dice") to the gimmickry of rock hucksters (the *faux* new wave of "Respectable," the minstrelsy of "Harlem Shuffle"). Catchy, but hardly the world's greatest.

J.D. CONSIDINE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Brown Sugar," "Wild Horses," "Tumbling Dice"

THE SMITHEREENS

ANTHOLOGY: FROM JERSEY IT CAME! ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Bar-band rock from New Jersey guys with unsettling facial hair

Like an R.E.M. from stinky New Jersey, the Smithereens trolled the corners of "I Love the '60s" territory, refashioning the crunchy power pop of the Kinks and the Who for '80s college kids suspicious of synths. Where the boys from Athens used nostalgia as a launching pad into beauty and mystique, they rarely progressed beyond finely crafted pastiche. This double-disc compilation draws heavily on the '86 to '91 period that opened with a handful of paisley tunes about girls, and ended with a Liz Phair-like bid for mainstream success under David Lee Roth producer Ed Stasium. As

I LOVE THIS CD!

KEIRA KNIGHTLEY
ACTRESS IN *LOVE ACTUALLY, KING ARTHUR*

JEFF BUCKLEY
GRACE
COLUMBIA

"It's the most sensational album ever. You can't listen to it and not cry."

The Stones: "Wait. Maybe I'm Keith and you're Ron!"

they're already well-served by a pair of 1995 collections, one for hits and one for rarities, *From Jersey It Came!* is pleasant, if unnecessary.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Blood & Roses," "Top of the Pops"

S.O.S. BAND

GREATEST HITS ✪✪✪

TABU/EMI

Techno-soul titans from Atlanta get a screwed-up retrospective

The S.O.S. Band entered groove heaven on their fourth album, joined with writer-producers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis – who, 20-plus years later, remain the world's signal creators of soul. This compilation should have restored to print S.O.S.'s bonkers-brilliant work with Jam-Lewis, leaving earlier hits as footnotes. Instead, the compilers stick amusements such as "S.O.S (Dit Dit Dit Dash Dash Dash Dit Dit Dit)" along rare works of sonic sculpture such as "The Finest." So forget logical listening. Program "Just Be Good to Me," a masterpiece of rhythmic rub and wild desire, and the stupendously poised ballad "Sands of Time." Meshes of raw emotions and secret machines come no finer.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "The Finest," "Just Be Good to Me"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best REISSUES of the last three months

THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.

READY TO DIE

BAD BOY/UNIVERSAL

Playful, suicidal, disgusting and hilarious, Biggie's debut returns a decade later, expanded with two new bonus tracks and five videos.

TALKING HEADS

THE NAME OF THIS BAND IS TALKING HEADS

SIRE/WARNER BROS./RHINO

This live 1982 double CD traces the Heads' evolution from nerdy art-rockers to . . . nerdy funk-rockers!

X

THE BEST: MAKE THE MUSIC GO BANG!

RHINO/ELEKTRA

Punk gangbangs rockabilly on two-CD anthology documenting the rise and fizzle of these enduring L.A. bohos.

PATSY CLINE

THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION

MCA NASHVILLE

Remastered hits from the Nashville genius whose soulful twang birthed modern country, before she died in a 1963 plane crash.

SOUL ASYLUM

AFTER THE FLOOD: LIVE FROM THE GRAND FORKS PROM ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Minnesota alt-rockers find their calling as a kick-ass prom band

In 1997, Soul Asylum performed at a prom to cheer up the kids in flood-ravaged North Dakota. After a decade-long career as punk rockers, they'd recently changed gears with the mid-tempo hit "Runaway Train," and though they were then (and briefly) the kings of alternative nation, they took the high school gig seriously – for one night, they transformed from meticulous alt-rockers to a fast and loose bar band. Of the 18 tracks, a handful are hormone-arousing covers – from Alice Cooper's "School's Out" to Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing" – and the oldies reveal the whiny blandness of singer Dave Pirner's own angsty compositions. With the exception of a wild bash through the frustration ode "Somebody to Shove," the band's regular repertoire (including "Runaway Train" and "Misery") are party-killers. Pirner, most of all, sounds invigorated by the diversion. When the gravel-voiced singer belts out Glen Campbell's '70s-smooth "Rhinestone Cowboy," he turns it into his own mantra. Given the band's current state of irrelevance, they may be available for weddings and bar mitzvahs

ERIK HIMMELSBACH

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Rhinestone Cowboy," "Sexual Healing"

SUPERGRASS

SUPERGRASS IS 10: THE BEST OF '94–'04 ✪✪✪✪

ISLAND

Underappreciated Brit-pop trio gets their moment in the sun

Named not for potent weed but after the nickname given to major police informants in the '70s, Supergrass have all the cheeky, blokey charm their name suggests. At their most upbeat – the pub-piano anthems "Alright," "Mansize Rooster" and "Pumping On Your Stereo" – they make Madness seem as morose as Radiohead, with a Cockney verve that summons an image of Dick Van Dyke capering across the London skyline. Their appeal hasn't traveled, and even at home, this staple of outdoor mega-festivals still jokingly resigns itself to being "Britain's fifth favorite band." Nice guys finish better than that, though. This

Top to bottom: Henry Diltz/Corbis; Doug Peters/alliaction.co.uk/Retna Ltd.

Supergrass rise above unfortunate luggage mix-up.

decade-spanning best-of reveals musical richness (bits of the Stones, Pink Floyd and Marc Bolan), wry humor and discipline in nailing a hook. The slight anachronisms – their giant sideburns, and glam-rock axe-outs – only help make then more fun than rock & roll has any right to be.
ANDREW HARRISON
DOWNLOAD THESE: "Caught By the Fuzz," "Alright," "Moving"

THE URINALS

NEGATIVE CAPABILITY . . . CHECK IT OUT! ✪✪✪

WARNING LABEL

Brainy L.A. punks were so fake, they sounded like the real thing

They called themselves a "punk parody" band, took their name from a human-waste receptacle, and spilled over with attitude; the Urinals played hide-and-seek with the difference between being genuine and being goofballs. Formed at UCLA in 1978, this reunited trio's idea of a good song was two chords that sounded like they'd been wrenched from their instruments with crowbars. Their clipped style (their best song, "Ack Ack Ack Ack," is 60 seconds long), bristling sound and outsider status made them anti-

Alison Krauss is *so* up to something.

heroes for alt-rock all-stars to come, like Yo La Tengo and Butthole Surfers, both of whom covered Urinals songs. On "I'm a Bug" or "Male Masturbation," leader and bassist John Talley-Jones offers existential musings in a flat but earnest voice ("I said I needed you/You said you needed me/Mutual selfish desire"). The Urinals could muse, wisecrack and pontificate – all in one spasm.
JASON GROSS
DOWNLOAD THESE: "Ack, Ack, Ack, Ack," "I'm a Bug"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

CAN'T YOU HEAR ME CALLIN' – BLUEGRASS: 80 YEARS OF AMERICAN MUSIC ✪✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Four discs of prime bluegrass means: banjos, banjos, banjos!

Probably the most formidable bluegrass anthology yet, *Can't You Hear Me Callin' – Bluegrass: 80 Years of American Music* neatly cracks open the central questions of what the music is, who its innovators were, how it modernized while retaining its essential elements of string music, muscular soloing and vocal harmony, and how its prime players wove in and out of each other's bands. Bill Monroe, credited with inventing the genre, is the compass; he and his aesthetic descendants are most represented. But behind and around it are the early hillbilly music of Gid Tanner and his Skillet Lickers, the Carter Family's cross between self-conscious folklore and true leatherstocking genius, the instrumental extravagance of Arthur Smith and Don Reno, the hokum of Grandpa Jones, the death-haunting of Ralph Stanley and the Bailes Brothers, the close harmony of the brothers Webster and Louvin, and the rock, pop, and country extensions of the Byrds, Alison Krauss and Patty Loveless. Beautifully chosen and remastered, and highly listenable.
BEN RATLIFF
DOWNLOAD THESE: "The Drunkard's Grave" (The Bailes Brothers); "Blue Moon of Kentucky" (Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys); "Ruby, Are You Mad?" (The Osborne Brothers & Red Allen) ➔

Derek Ridgers/LFI, Cristina Estadella/Corbis Outline

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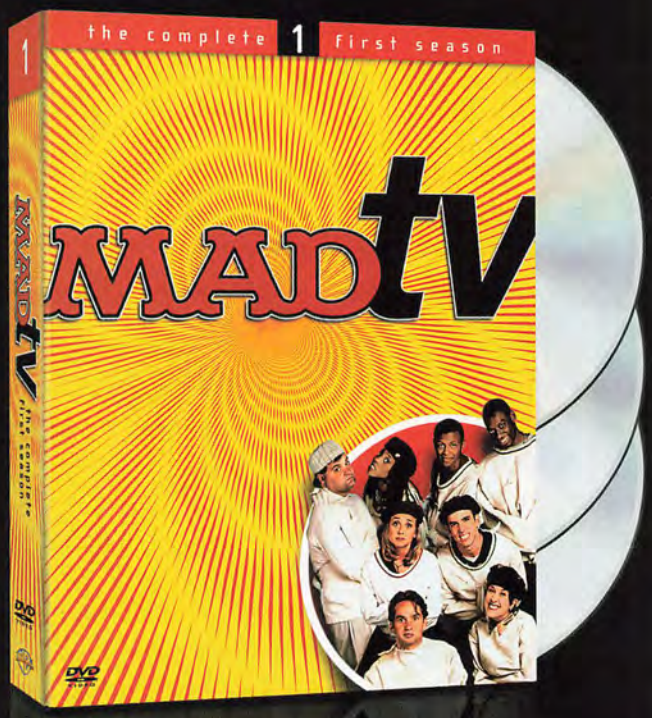

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REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

Miles Davis: "Smack makes microphones look huge."

ROY ACUFF

THE ESSENTIAL ROY ACUFF ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Roy Acuff, the link between yodeling Jimmie Rodgers and honky-tonk god Hank Williams, became known as the king of country music with these irresistible '40s recordings. Backed by the jaunty Smoky Mountain Boys, the Tennessee singer is passionate yet playful, uncorking landmark tracks, such as "Wabash Cannon Ball" and "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," the future Willie Nelson hit.

PETER CASE

WHO'S GONNA GO YOUR CROOKED MILE? ✪✪✪

VANGUARD

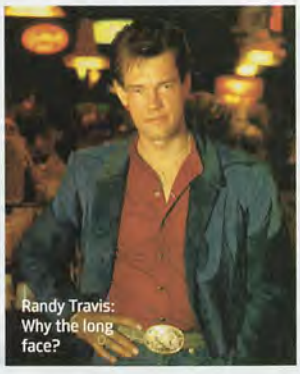
After making terrific power pop with the Plimsouls, an L.A. band, raspy Peter Case assumed wilier guises as a solo artist, including "country-blues fanatic" and "Woody Guthrie disciple." While this survey of four previous albums suffers from verbal overload, he achieves angry brilliance on the brand-new "Wake Up Call," a chunky rocker dissecting the prison scandal at Abu Ghraib in Iraq.

MILES DAVIS

SEVEN STEPS: THE COMPLETE COLUMBIA RECORDINGS OF MILES DAVIS 1963–1964 ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

A tender intensity marks the acoustic jazz on this seven-disc epic, which introduces several unreleased tracks and includes the restless trumpet genius' haunting take on classic ballads like "My Funny Valentine." Along for the ride are pianist Herbie Hancock, teenage drummer Tony Williams and Wayne Shorter, whose sultry, Coltrane-influenced tenor sax provides a tart counterpoint to Davis's slinky-cool blowing.


Randy Travis: Why the long face?

FAULTLINE

YOUR LOVE MEANS EVERYTHING ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Think you're depressed? Check out the chilly, downbeat electronica of London's David Kosten, aka Faultline, who clearly needs a big hug. Guest singers Michael Stipe of R.E.M. and Chris Martin of Coldplay slide easily into the swamp of melancholy on this 2002 album, though the Flaming Lips' adorable Wayne Coyne wisely prefers his own dizzy reality, as usual.

ALEXANDER O'NEAL

GREATEST HITS ✪✪

TABU/EMI

Riding synth-driven funk grooves, O'Neal sprang from the same Minneapolis scene that spawned Prince and The Time. Sadly, the clanking beats and glossy production effects (often from Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis) reduce him to a bystander to his own songs when he could have been a classic-soul shouter. The lusty "Fake" hints at glories unachieved.

RANDY TRAVIS

THE VERY BEST OF RANDY TRAVIS ✪✪✪✪

RHINO

Emerging in the mid-'80s, Randy Travis helped rescue country music from artistic bankruptcy with traditional crooning in the George Jones style. If he doesn't possess the flair of George Strait, weepers like "Hard Rock Bottom of Your Heart" can still turn sentimental fools into mush. Be sure to avoid the ghastly "Three Wooden Crosses," however.

Top to bottom: Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis; John McMurtrie/Retna UK

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THE SMITHS ★ MORRISSEY

EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

SOME FANS SPIT; others throw underwear. Morrissey's fans, though, toss gladioli and daffodils at him. Emerging from Manchester, England, at the helm of the Smiths, he brought sharp-tongued camp and morose self-pity to '80s indie rock, influencing a rash of bleating emo-rockers — and Radiohead — while guitar sidekick Johnny Marr fused Brit-Invasion pop, rockabilly and glam in unlikely ways.

After the Smiths split in 1987, Morrissey found solo success despite his controversial soap-boxing ("I don't think black people and white people will ever get on"), avarice (former drummer Mike Joyce took him to court for back-pay) and weakness for sub-par collaborators. His current return to form, accompanied by typical swipes at his supposed enemies — judges, creditors, journalists — finds his trademark Elvis Presley coif grayer but prouder than ever.

TONY POWER

The Smiths try to decide whether to be Crips or Bloods.

BLENDER APPROVED

THE SMITHS
THE QUEEN IS DEAD *SIRE, 1986*

★★★★★

The über-Smiths album, funnier ("Frankly, Mr Shankly") and sadder ("I Know It's Over") than the rest. Morrissey is happy to gamble with death ("If a double-decker bus crashes into us. . .") as though sure of immortality, while Johnny Marr delivers psychedelic rock and music-hall miniatures ("Vicar In a Tutu") with equal genius.
Download these: "The Queen Is Dead," "Cemetry Gates," "There Is a Light That Never Goes Out"

MORRISSEY
VAUXHALL AND I *SIRE, 1994*

★★★★★

Thom Yorke's favorite Morrissey record is a doomed crooner's late-night opus, with Moz assessing love like some kind of queeny Sinatra among rough lads, "loafing oafs" and, of course, Morrissey-haters. Superb centerpiece "The More You Ignore Me, The Closer I Get" thumbs its nose at the press — Morrissey's favorite sport! — while epic-rock closer "Speedway" comes on like the apocalypse. Lush!
Download these: "Now My Heart Is Full," "Speedway"

THE SMITHS
VERY BEST OF THE SMITHS

WEA INTERNATIONAL, 2001

★★★★★

Derided by hardcore fans as being "too obvious" — they prefer longer, duller collections — this is the perfect primer, and the non-chronological sequencing lends the free-and-easy feel of an iPod mix. The 23 superb songs, including the long version of their breeziest pop single, "Ask," reveal Morrissey as the most gleefully cynical pop lyricist since Roger Waters: "If it's not love, then it's the bomb that will bring us together." The best of the many best-ofs.
Download these: "How Soon Is Now?", "Reel Around the Fountain," "Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me"

GREAT

THE SMITHS
THE SMITHS *SIRE, 1984*

★★★★

This debut ignored the garish '80s going on in Duran Duran's penthouse. Marr, still in his teens, launched a new way of playing guitar with his intricate, jangling song structures. Morrissey's message: It's OK to be fey. . . .
Download these: "Hand In Glove," "This Charming Man"

THE SMITHS
STRANGEWAYS, HERE WE COME *SIRE, 1987*

★★★★

The final album, released posthumously, was eviscerated for evidence of the rift that parted the band. There isn't any, though — merely their sturdiest pop music. Marr felt he couldn't top this, so he left.
Download this: "Stop Me if You Think You've Heard This One Before"

MORRISSEY
YOUR ARSENAL *SIRE, 1992*

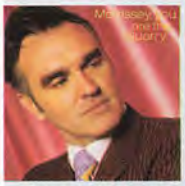
★★★★

Morrissey's brashest album saved his career after the nonsense of *Kill Uncle*. Funny yet controversial ("The National Front Disco" referenced far-Right politics), it was the first to really snag U.S. attention.
Download this: "Glamorous Glue"

MORRISSEY
YOU ARE THE QUARRY

ATTACK/SANCTUARY, 2004

★★★★



A return to the spirit of *Vauxhall and I*. New sounds, including (gadzooks!) dance rhythms, shuffle in, and though Moz is prone to dull victim fantasies, this is not the self-pity fest of *Maladjusted*. Phew.
Download this: "Come Back to Camden"

Note: Not all of the "Download these" songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD. This page: Stephen Wright/Redferns/Retna Ltd.

CHECK IT OUT

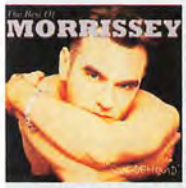
THE SMITHS
HATFUL OF HOLLOW *SIRE, 1984*
✪✪✪

A round-up of rare tracks that flatter Morrissey's cast of trapped lovers and sex-starved bookworms with a tougher, cleaner sound. "How Soon Is Now?", built on Marr's Bo Diddley-style guitar wobble, looms large.
Download these: "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now," "How Soon Is Now?"

THE SMITHS
THE WORLD WON'T LISTEN
ROUGH TRADE, 1987
✪✪✪

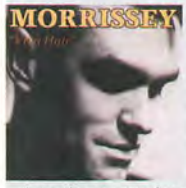
Hatful of Hollow Mk II: a compilation highlighting the Smiths' furious, '60s-style productivity. Non-album singles "Ask" and "Shoplifters of the World Unite" are instant melody bombs.
Download these: "Panic," "Half a Person," "You Just Haven't Earned It Yet, Baby"

MORRISSEY
SUEDEHEAD: THE BEST OF MORRISSEY
EMI, 1997
✪✪✪✪



For all the deification of the Smiths, cherry-picking from Morrissey's solo output is nearly as rewarding. "Sunny" and "Boxers" proved his last truly great productions until this year's revival.
Download these: "Everyday Is Like Sunday," "You're the One for Me, Fatty"

MORRISSEY
VIVA HATE *SIRE, 1988*
✪✪✪



The fifth Smiths album – kind of. Producer/songwriter Stephen Street provides uncanny Marr impressions while Morrissey delves into the past to hymn the wet streets and stewed tea of his youth.
Download this: "Suedehead"

BE CAREFUL

THE SMITHS
MEAT IS MURDER *SIRE, 1985*
✪✪✪

Released on Valentine's Day, it became a number 1 album in the U.K. even without the later addition of "How Soon Is Now?" Glibly issues-driven, it addresses vegetarianism on the title track, corporal punishment ("The Headmaster Ritual") and child abuse ("Barbarism Begins At Home").
Download these: "Rusholme Ruffians," "That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore"

THE SMITHS
RANK *SIRE, 1988*
✪✪

Recorded live in London in 1986, and proof of the onstage machismo of Britain's supposedly poofiest band. A powerful version of "I Know It's Over" ends with the sound of a booing crowd.
Download these: "What She Said," "Is It Really So Strange?" "I Know It's Over"

MORRISSEY
BONA DRAG *SIRE, 1990*
✪✪

While he floundered to replace Stephen Street, whom he foolishly parted ways with over a dispute about money, this solo album was another record of singles and session flotsam.
Download these: "Last of the Famous International Playboys"

MORRISSEY
UNDER THE INFLUENCE
DMC, 2003
✪✪

Here, he presents the songs that formed him. This means '60s camp from U.K. screen icon Diana Dors, punk fury from the Ramones and early '80s weirdness from Klaus Nomi.
Download this: "One Hand Loose" (Charlie Feathers)

FOR FANS ONLY

MORRISSEY
KILL UNCLE *SIRE, 1991*
✪✪

Wrong cowriter (Mark Nevin, with whom he collaborated by mail) and wrong producers (Langer & Winstanley, known for their work with Madness) conspire to make a prissy pop record through which Moz appears to mince self-parodically.
Download these: "There's a Place In Hell For Me and My Friends"

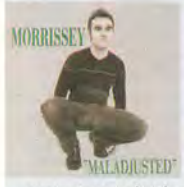
MORRISSEY
BEETHOVEN WAS DEAF
EMI, 1993
✪

Always a fine live act – and Morrissey's stately tenor has even improved with age – the Moz band fail to transcend the rarely exciting live album. Acceptable souvenir of the *Your Arsenal* tour, if you happen to have been there.
Download these: "Glamorous Glue"

MORRISSEY
SOUTHPAW GRAMMAR
REPRISE, 1995
✪✪

Ugly, noisy, grumpy album, recorded while Britpop stole Moz's thunder and the Mike Joyce court case loomed. Devoid of tunes, his band sounds like a liability. Come back, Mark Nevin!
Download these: "Southpaw"

MORRISSEY
MALADJUSTED *MERCURY, 1997*
✪



The poorest full solo album, dragged down by bitterness (he'd lost the court case). "Sorrow Will Come In the End" threatened violence against an individual who was so obviously Mike Joyce that the track was pulled from the U.K. pressing.
Download these: "Ammunition"

FURTHER VIEWING

THE SMITHS: THE COMPLETE PICTURE
WARNER BROS., 1992
✪✪✪✪

The TV appearances are like broadcasts from another, less glamour-obsessed planet, as Morrissey affects a hearing aid as a fashion prop on U.K. pop shows, and bicycles around Manchester in the video for "Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before."

FURTHER LISTENING

ELECTRONIC ELECTRONIC
WARNER BROS., 1991
✪✪✪

Post-Smiths, Johnny Marr played guitar with The The and Bryan Ferry, but this remains his best non-Smiths work – a clean, futuristic dance-pop ideal forged with New Order's Bernard Sumner. Currently, he leads the worthless Healers.

FURTHER READING

MORRISSEY& MARR: THE SEVERED ALLIANCE BY JOHNNY ROGAN
OMNIBUS PRESS
✪✪✪✪✪

Worth seeking out if you have any interest in Morrissey's psyche. Tenacious rock gumshoe Rogan revealed so much about the singer's past that Moz publicly wished the author would die in a freeway accident.

Isaac Brock of Modest Mouse: Believe it or not, he's singing about misery.

2004'S SURPRISE BREAKOUT BAND!

Mighty Mouse

After years of booze and obscurity, alt-rock depressives take a victory lap

MODEST MOUSE

THE FILLMORE, DENVER, CO

JULY 26, 2004 ★★★★

HALFWAY THROUGH their set at this cavernous former roller-rink, Modest Mouse frontman Isaac Brock starts clawing slowly at his guitar, groaning, "I was in heaven, I was in hell."

People in the first few rows, crushed against the stage, erupt in shrieks and bound into the air, even though the song's moving at a crawl. Everyone else is standing still, a little confused: What's the big deal?

Brock's singing "Doin' the Cockroach," from *The Lonesome Crowded West*, a seven-year-old album that most of the 3,600 fans here have never heard. But the devout ones know what's about to happen. Drummer Jeremiah Green kicks into a high-speed disco beat, and the whole crowd starts bouncing, too.

Formed more than a decade ago in the nowheresville of Issaquah, Washington, Modest Mouse built a cult following for Brock's raspy evocations of endless highways and shitty suburbs as well as for their droning guitar whine, which is as arid, hot and gritty as a desert gust.

Following a long, turbulent stretch during which Brock was briefly jailed on an old DWI charge, they've scored an unexpected hit with the jubilant stomp "Float On," and their new album, *Good News for People Who Love Bad News*, has crept onto *Billboard*'s Top 20, selling more than 630,000 copies.

Fans old and new pump their fists to "Float On," the third song. (You can't really sing along with Brock's cracked, chalky lisp.) Most of the time, though, the band's effectively playing to two audiences at once.

The expanded tour lineup alternates pairs of densely orchestrated *Good News* songs with loose, quirky oldies, such as "Interstate 8" and "Trailer Trash." Green, who quit two days into *Good News* sessions due to struggles with bipolar disorder, is back, and he bashes out the old stuff with explosive precision. He looks less certain about donning headphones to sync up with programmed rhythms on some new material, though.

"Jeremiah's new to it," Brock tells *Blender*. "We're into beats and shit like that; on tour we're listening to Dizzee Rascal."

That's part of what's made this their breakout moment: They've expanded far beyond alt-rock, and, Brock notes, "people seem to be a lot more receptive than I thought they'd be to the weirder, quiet songs" — notably "Satin in a Coffin" and "Bukowski," for which he trades his guitar for a banjo.

Good News has been repeatedly described as "upbeat." "Float On" even includes the line "Sometimes life's OK." For a guy like Brock, that's practically *Annie* territory. And he no longer turns up for gigs drunk and rambling; during tonight's 75-minute show, he barely opens his mouth between songs.

Still, his lyrics are darker than ever. The old stuff is about open spaces; *Good News* is mostly death and stasis: "You wasted life, why wouldn't you waste the afterlife?" he sneers late in the set to audience roars.

Denver has an odd way of showing its love, though. "I started seeing flip-flops flying at me," he says after the show. "Like, *nine* of them. Who wears flip-flops to a rock show? Bad idea!" *DOUGLAS WOLK*

HOW'D YOU LIKE THE SHOW?

"I was impressed that they played a lot of older stuff. I was afraid they'd drop those songs now that they've gotten big."
LINDSAY ST. JOHN, 21, FORT COLLINS, CO

"I saw them at a smaller show, but Isaac was drunk and couldn't sing. But tonight, I was happy to hear 'Trailer Trash.'"
CHRIS CARPENTER, 16, DENVER, CO

"They still have the energy that got me into them. People say the new stuff sucks, but you should embrace change."
BRANDI SHIGLEY, 29, DENVER, CO

Tim Jackson

GUEST LIST

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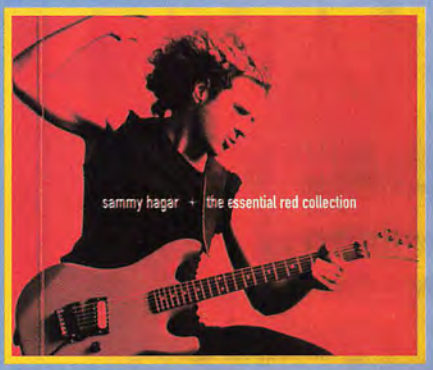

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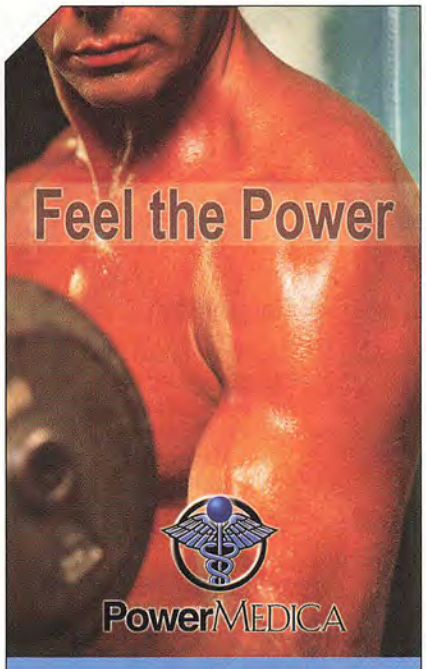

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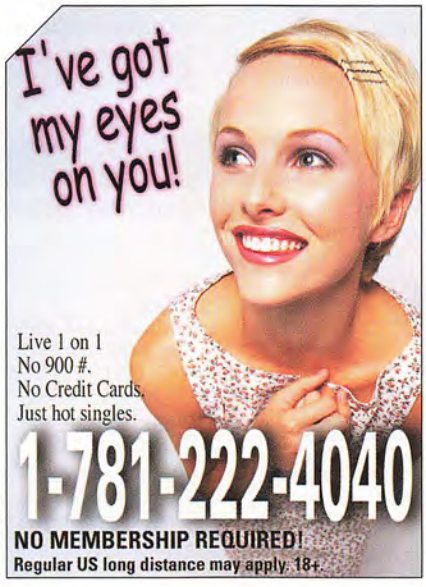

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The Brian Jonestown Massacre's Anton Newcombe has yet to get the hang of burning music!

THE GOOD!

BURN OUT

Madness! Jealousy! Drugs! A seven-years-in-the-making lesson on how *not* to become a rock star. By Clark Collis

DIG!

DIRECTED BY Ondi Timoner

STARRING The Brian Jonestown Massacre, The Dandy Warhols

"I'M HERE TO destroy this fucked-up system!" Anton Newcombe declares at the beginning of *Dig!* The Brian Jonestown Massacre frontman couldn't be more wrong. What the paranoid, dictatorial Newcombe is actually "here" to do, as this documentary makes painstakingly clear, is attack members of his own band, carry on jealousy-fueled feuds with more successful acts and, most of all, consume drugs like they were going out of style as quickly as his collection of cheesecloth shirts.

When debutante director Ondi Timoner started making *Dig!* back in the mid-'90s, she intended to feature an array of up-and-coming bands, but soon zeroed in on just two: Brian Jonestown Massacre and the Dandy Warhols. Although friends, the two acts very much represent an indie-rock yin and yang. The Dandies, led by ambitious singer Courtney Taylor (who also narrates the movie), sign to Capitol Records and soon thereafter find themselves living the high life of David LaChappelle–directed videos, luxurious tour buses and European success.

ROCK MOVIE OF THE YEAR

At the film's start, the Massacre are also hopeful of a major-label deal, but Newcombe spectacularly implodes onstage in Los Angeles at a Viper Room showcase gig, provoking a *Wrestlemania*-esque brawl onstage and losing a million-dollar contract in the process. From that point on, the antics of this "brilliant monster" take centerstage as he alienates his band, develops an extreme heroin habit and behaves in such a self-destructive fashion that when his band finally gets a deal, he doesn't attend the signing for fear that his obvious drug addiction will lead label execs to reconsider. The fact that this rock-star behavior comes from someone who isn't actually a rock star – and, thanks to that behavior, never will be – is the central tragedy of what may well be the saddest (but most entertaining) rock doc ever. Certainly, by the end of the film, the "system" remains determinedly unfucked. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of its principal subject.

Guess who got a ThighMaster for Christmas?

DOCU-MENTAL

Is **ANTON NEWCOMBE** the weirdest documentary subject of all time? Not even close . . . .

INTESTINES!

FILM: CRUMB

Cartoonist **Robert Crumb** (*left*) gained fame drawing huge-assed women – and he's the reasonably sane one of the family! His sibling Charles is a depressed shut-in, while a monkish third brother cleanses his intestines by ingesting linen. Mmm . . . ingested linen.

SCROTUM!

FILM: SICK

Bob Flanagan was a performance artist with cystic fibrosis, which isn't so weird. What is weird: His act was nailing his balls to a piece of wood.

IDIOT!

FILM: AMERICAN MOVIE

Does hapless odd-job man **Mark Borchardt** let a lack of money or talent stop him from making his utterly rotten horror movie, *Coven*? Hell, no!

From top: Sebastian Artz/Retna Ltd.; the Everett Collection (2)

THE BAD!

A SOUND OF THUNDER

DIRECTED BY Peter Hyams

STARRING Ed Burns, Ben Kingsley, Catherine McCormack

THERE ARE SOME bad movies that *Blender* would watch again only at gunpoint. But there are some films that suck in such a spectacularly stupid, big-budget fashion they can't help but be at least somewhat entertaining, and *A Sound of Thunder* looks like one of those. The perfect project for schlock auteur Peter Hyams (*Timecop, The Relic*), this Ray Bradbury adaptation finds time-traveling, big-game hunter Ed Burns accidentally erasing humanity from the future in the course of a prehistoric dinosaur safari. Ingmar Bergman fans should avoid it, but frankly, they had us at "time-traveling, big-game hunter."

& THE INDIE!

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

DIRECTED BY Walter Salles

STARRING Gael García Bernal, Rodrigo de la Serna

IN 1952, Argentine biochemist Alberto Granado set out on his motorbike to try to "get laid in every town in South America." But the journey had a far more profound effect on geopolitics than on his sex life. Why? Because Granado's 23-year-old road-trip buddy was Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the future revolutionary who would be changed forever by the injustices he saw on their trek. This authentic-looking Spanish-language recreation finds Gael García Bernal perfectly cast as Guevara, while the vistas are so beautiful, even the leper colonies look picture-postcard.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best MOVIES of the last three months

NAPOLEON DYNAMITE

Deadpan high-school comedy in which nerd triumphs over bullies — and a llama.

OPEN WATER

A pair of scubadivers gets abandoned in shark-infested waters. Two words, folks: holiday insurance!

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

ANN WILSON SINGER, HEART

"In America. It's a beautiful, soulful story with a great soundtrack."

AND THE REST...

DON'T MISS

CRIMINAL

DIRECTED BY Gregory Jacobs

STARRING John C. Reilly, Diego Luna, Maggie Gyllenhaal

THE PITCH Scam artists Reilly and *Y Tu Mamá También*'s Luna grift in L.A.

THE VERDICT Regular Stephen Soderbergh cinematographer Jacobs hangs a series of expertly acted character studies on the film's con-oriented plot, in which nothing is ever quite what it seems.

A DIRTY SHAME

DIRECTED BY John Waters

STARRING Tracey Ullman, Johnny Knoxville, Chris Isaak, Selma Blair, Lily Tomlin

THE PITCH Repressed convenience-store owner Tracey Ullman becomes a crazed sex vixen after receiving a knock to her head.

THE VERDICT Boasting tire-licking, old folks getting it on and a humongously boobed Selma Blair, this should be the most John-Watersy John Waters movie in years.

PRIMER

DIRECTED BY Shane Carruth

STARRING Shane Carruth, David Sullivan

THE PITCH While conducting extracurricular experiments in their garage, white-collar drones Carruth and Sullivan stumble on the greatest scientific discovery in history.

THE VERDICT We apologize for being so vague about *what* they discover, but that's the biggest treat in this idiosyncratic and unforgettable revamp of the sci-fi genre.

DON'T RUSH

WIMBLEDON

DIRECTED BY Richard Loncraine

STARRING Paul Bettany, Kirsten Dunst

THE PITCH Bettany tries to win the heart of tennis-tour "bad girl" Kirsten Dunst and Wimbledon at the same time.

THE VERDICT Though Bettany and Dunst got in top shape for the shoot, there may be a good reason why romantic comedies have not yet been set in the refined environs of the All-England Lawn Tennis Championship.

SHARK TALE

DIRECTED BY Bibo Bergeron, Vicky Jenson

STARRING Will Smith, Renée Zellweger, Robert De Niro, Martin Scorsese

THE PITCH A Will Smith–voiced fish pretends to kill the son of a shark Mob boss.

THE VERDICT We're happy to sit through more *Nemo*-ish underwater adventures. But De Niro and Scorsese used to make classics about troubled souls. Now they do the voices for CGI fish. This is progress?

TAXI

DIRECTED BY Tim Story

STARRING Queen Latifah, Jimmy Fallon

THE PITCH A cabbie (Latifah) helps an undercover cop (Fallon) thwart a gang of super-hottie supercriminals.

THE VERDICT The original French version was a massive success, and *Barbershop* director Tim Story should help former SNL-er Fallon in his quest to become the next Will Ferrell — and not the next Chris Kattan.

Top left: Murray Close; Center, top to bottom: courtesy of Fox Searchlight; Laura Lau; Jeffrey Mayer/Wireimage.com; Right, top to bottom: Suzanne Hanover; courtesy of Fox Searchlight; James Bridges /Fine Line Features; Laurie Sparham; courtesy of Dreamworks Pictures; Kerry Hayes

"Yoda, that better be a light saber I'm feeling. . . ."

ON DVD, IT IS!

The geektastic sci-fi blockbuster is out, and it's got nearly everything except (mercifully) Jar-Jar Binks. By Clark Collis

STAR WARS TRILOGY

DIRECTED BY George Lucas, Irvin Kershner, Richard Marquand

STARRING Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Alec Guinness

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪✪✪

IS THERE ANYTHING left to be said about the original *Star Wars* trilogy that has not yet been covered by Kevin Smith and doctorate-thesis writers? Probably not. You either regard *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* as amongst the greatest movies ever made — and possibly the pinnacle of Western civilization so far — or this is simply not the 'droid-filled trilogy you're looking for.

But for all who recognized that last reference, the first-ever DVD release of the films will mark the happy end of a very, very long wait.

First, the bad news. The films being made available are the 1997 CGI-enhanced releases, not the *original* originals. Which is fine, except you'd think George Lucas could have included both versions, rather than waiting to sell essentially the same films later on, thus achieving his apparent ambition to become richer than Bill Gates or, at least, God.

THE MOVIES THEMSELVES LOOK PRISTINE.

Otherwise, this four-disc set redefines the concept of an "essential purchase" for fans. The movies themselves look pristine, thanks to a restoration process that involved removing almost 10 million little scratches and pieces of dirt from each negative.

The extras on the DVD, meanwhile, are expansive, to say the least, and include short documentaries, never-before-seen production stills and a behind-the-scenes preview of the next *Star Wars* movie.

Most impressive is a new feature-length documentary for which the filmmakers were allowed to use anything they wanted from the vast Lucasfilm archives, except 1978's hilariously dreadful *Star Wars Holiday Special*, starring Bea Arthur. As Yoda might say, a sense of his films' place in cinematic history George Lucas has; sense of humor he, apparently, has not.

THE ALAMO

BUENA VISTA HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪

Remember *The Alamo*? Probably not, as this lavish but phenomenally dull historical recreation disappeared from screens quicker than you can say, "Wow, that really is a lot of Mexicans!" Billy Bob Thornton is mildly diverting as Davy Crockett, but Jason Patric's half-dead James Bowie is so dour that it's hard to imagine him leading soldiers to the mall, let alone to certain doom.

COFFEE AND CIGARETTES

MGM HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪✪

If Jim Jarmusch's series of caffeine-and-nicotine–obsessed short films is uneven, it's also very much worth a view, thanks to the high quotient of self-deprecatory performances by celebrities playing themselves. Of particular note are "Somewhere in California" (Tom Waits reveals his medical side-career to Iggy Pop); "Delirium" (RZA and GZA call moonlighting waiter Bill Murray "Billmurray" a zillion times); and the self-explanatory "Jack Shows Meg His Tesla Coil. "

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR: UNRATED VERSION

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪

The idea of a porn actress moving in next door to a horny teenager sounds very much like the plot of, well, a porn movie. But despite the "unrated" tag, this vehicle for *24*'s Elisha Cuthbert doesn't show much more skin than your average teen comedy. Its high-school hijinks, though, are surprisingly funny, even if the movie can't decide whether it wants to praise porn or wag a finger at it. Among the extras, be sure to check out "The Eli Experience," in which costar Chris Marquette punks a Las Vegas porn convention. Never have a threadbare mattress, a few curtains and a plastic sword been put to better use. *ERIC ALT*

HOW'S YOUR NEWS?

SHOUT! FACTORY

✪✪✪

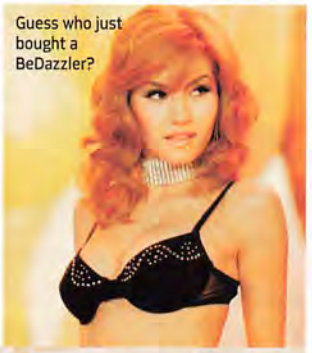
Executive-produced by *South Park*'s Trey Parker and Matt Stone, this documentary follows a group of mentally and/or physically challenged people interviewing bystanders — or, in the more severe cases, incoherently shouting at them. If it's hard at times not to laugh with and at them, *News* is genuinely touching overall. The special-feature encounter between one "reporter" and his hero, soap actor Chad Everett, is indeed "special" in every imaginable way.

THE LOST BOYS

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

Are you nostalgic for that micro-moment in the '80s when Corey Haim and Corey Feldman were bona fide movie stars rather than punch lines? If so, this special edition of Joel Schumacher's culty teen-vampire flick, still a glorious triumph of mullet-heavy style over content,



Guess who just bought a BeDazzler?

Mean girls — and hot ones, too.

From top: Courtesy of Lucasfilm; courtesy of 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment; Michael Gibson

Videodrome: "No, there's no Hugh Jass here, you got the wrong number — oh, I get it. . . ."

is most definitely for you. Extras include a mini-documentary about the Coreys' friendship that we can only assume plays on permanent rotation in hell ("We just hit it off. His name is Corey, my name is Corey . . . ."). director Richard Linklater, but what does go on is surprisingly entertaining. Examining the habits, desires and celebrity-pap-smear-selling tendencies of Austin, Texas's denizens over a 24-hour period, *Slacker* manages to be charming and darkly funny: Upon being offered condolences after his stepfather's funeral, one character dryly responds, "Fuck him. I'll probably go back next week and dance on the fucker's grave." *GABE SORIA*

MEAN GIRLS

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

★★★★★

Although off-puttingly preceded by a freakin' *SpongeBob SquarePants* trailer at the multiplex where *Blender* originally saw it, *Mean Girls* is far from average kiddie fare. Lindsay Lohan stars as a student who finds her new environment every bit as tricky to negotiate, and as potentially lethal, as the African plains on which she was raised. Caustic laughs, just the right amount of feel-good moments and a girl whose breasts can tell when it's raining ensue, courtesy of Tina Fey's razor-sharp script.

SLACKER

CRITERION COLLECTION

★★★★

Very little happens in this micro-budget 1991 film by *School of Rock*

VIDEODROME

CRITERION COLLECTION

★★★★★

One of the great head-fucks of all time, David Cronenberg's 1983 movie seems more prescient with each passing year. James Woods plays a sleazy cable-TV boss whose quest for ratings leads him to a tape of graphic torture not terribly far removed from many of today's reality shows. Just be glad that watching *Fear Factor* doesn't cause you to disgorge guns from your stomach, which is what footage here does to the increasingly crazed, hallucinating and homicidal Woods. Includes a documentary, commentaries and a Cronenberg short, "Camera."

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of the last three months

AQUA TEEN HUNGER FORCE: VOLUME II

WARNER HOME VIDEO

The continuing adventures of three fast-food–based "superheroes."

GOODFELLAS Special Edition

WARNER HOME VIDEO

Martin Scorsese's classic tale of Mob life, murder, mayhem — and the correct way to chop garlic.

MUSIC DVDs

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

WARNER BROS.

★★★★

It's 1972: The Rolling Stones blaze through "Street Fighting Man" and party with naked groupies. Five years later, Elvis Costello sneers "Alison" in his first TV spot. In this 10-hour epic, moments of music's revolutionary and destructive power are wrapped around modern interviews with everyone from Little Richard to Chuck D. The series aired in 1995 to mark the 40th anniversary of rock, but there's enough bad attitude and sleaze to make it required viewing for aspiring troublemakers. *JON YOUNG*

MATCHBOX TWENTY
SHOW: A NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF MATCHBOX TWENTY

COMING HOME STUDIOS

★★

Matchbox Twenty stage an ordinary concert aided by a light show that makes them look like U2. The songs are muscular, but they're a pedestrian act, as the tour's program attests. *NICK DUERDEN*

WEEN
LIVE IN CHICAGO

SANCTUARY

★★★★

Somehow, despite their songs about spinal meningitis and pork rolls, quirk-rock duo Ween have avoided the novelty-act tag. On this career-spanning set from last year's Quebec tour, they masterfully walk the line between stupid and clever. *STEVE KANDELL*

TORI AMOS
WELCOME TO SUNNY FLORIDA

EPIC

★★★

Documenting the final show of last year's Scarlet's Walk tour, this contains all we expect from a Tori show: perfect renditions of career highlights, ethereal rambling and, of course, a wampum prayer ritual. Fun, if you like that sort of thing. *LAUREN HARRIS*

FLEETWOOD MAC
LIVE IN BOSTON

REPRISE

★★★

This two-disc set captures the classic '70s Mac lineup, minus Christine McVie, on tour in 2003. Closeups of the now long-toothed rockers are wisely avoided, but those who prefer their Mac wrinkle-free should check out the live audio CD. *CLARK COLLIS*

ZZ TOP
GREATEST HITS

WEA

★★

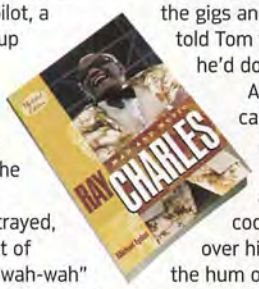
Beards, girls and synchronized guitar twirls — that's what ZZ Top videos were made of. Sadly, it's now all well past its sell-by date. And the fact that the man-turns-into-lunch hijinks of "Burger Man" must be seen to be believed is no reason to see it. *CLARK COLLIS*

Clockwise from top, left column: The Everett Collection; courtesy of Warner Home Video; courtesy of The Cartoon Network

HIGH AS A KITE

Undeterred by blindness and heroin addiction, R&B legend Ray Charles flies a plane across America!

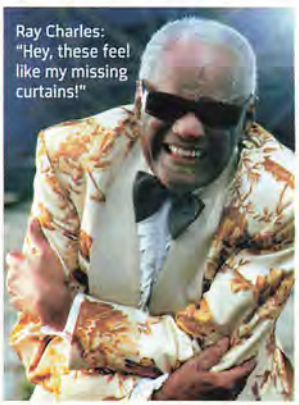
THEY FLEW OUT of the South and into the Northeast. Most nights, once at cruising altitude, pilot Tom McGarrity switched the Martin to autopilot, a device that picked up radio beams from beacons across the country.



When the plane stayed on course, the beams hummed in sync, but when it strayed, the beams went out of sync, creating the "wah-wah" familiar to anyone who's tuned guitar or violin strings. Autopilot set allowable limits to the wah-wah, and nudged the plane back on course whenever it approached them. The device, however, had a manual override, and many nights, as they flew to the dawn, Ray, revved up after the gigs and unable to sleep, told Tom to kill the autopilot, he'd do it himself.

As the gang quit their card games, yawned, curled up under blankets, and fell asleep, Ray sat in the cockpit, headphones over his ears, listening to the hum of the beam tones, easing the stick right or left at the first whisper of a wah-wah.

Fatigue and the day's drugs left him spent but mellow. High above the clouds, the day's hassles, the concert and the crowds . . . [his wife] Della and the kids, [his mistress] Mae and her threats, [his ex-mistress] Sandra Jean and her lawyers, all dropped far, far away. Ray let himself slip into a realm of pure sound, quietly proud that 25 people trusted him to guide them safely in the big plane, blind through the night.


Ray Charles: "Hey, these feel like my missing curtains!"

Excerpted from Ray Charles: Man and Music, *by Michael Lydon, © 2004 Reprinted with permission from Routledge*

PROOF

By Jim Marshall

✪✪✪✪ *CHRONICLE BOOKS, $40*

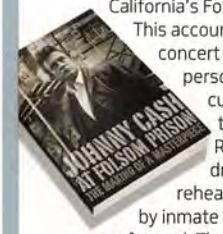
"Roll no. 4078: The Arm. Frame number thirty-two," is how celebrated photographer Jim Marshall identifies his iconic shot of the legendary Jimi Hendrix, photographed with his eyes closed, arm aloft, rehearsing for Monterey Pop. This collection also offers up shots 31 and 33 of Hendrix – as well as the rest of the film shot that day – with photographs of Bob Dylan and Jerry Garcia laid out alongside the original contact sheets, providing absorbing insight into how the photographer captured some of the most famous images of the '60s. *ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM*

JOHNNY CASH AT FOLSOM PRISON

THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE

By Michael Streissguth

✪✪✪✪ *DA CAPO PRESS, $24*



In 1968, his career dormant, Johnny Cash decided to record a show at California's Folsom Prison. This account of that concert entwines vivid personal and cultural narratives: Gov. Ronald Reagan drops by the rehearsals; a ballad by inmate Glen Sherley is performed. The aftermath could've been sung by Cash himself: The album relaunched Cash's career; Glen Sherley was granted early release, and toured with Cash, but ended up getting fired and blowing his own brains out. *MICHAEL ODELL*

HIP: THE HISTORY

By John Leland

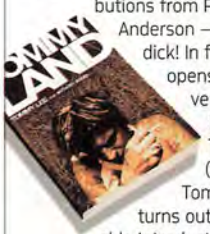
✪✪✪ *ECCO, $27*

Admitting he may not be hip himself doesn't stop *New York Times* writer John Leland from calling his acknowledgements page "Shout Outs" as if he were on *TRL*, and referring to Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman as "hip's O.G.s, or original gangstas." Disco-vicar phraseology aside, this thorough and engaging book details hip's history, tracing it through blues, punk, rap, electronica and beyond. But Leland's conclusion – that we've entered an era where everybody's hip –seems a little optimistic given the continuing success of Clay Aiken. *ADAM BREBNER*

TOMMYLAND

By Tommy Lee and Anthony Bozza

✪✪✪ *ATRIA BOOKS, $26*



Although co-written with music hack Bozza, this autobiography of the Mötley Crüe drummer and former drug repository also features contributions from Pamela Anderson – and his own dick! In fact, the book opens with a conversation between Tommy and (not-so) Little Tommy. That turns out to be a suitable introduction to the ensuing stream of engagingly gossipy recollections which, while covering Lee's time in both the Crüe and prison, are principally concerned with his oddly touching search for the perfect bedmate – or three. *CLARK COLLIS*

BLENDER APPROVED

The best BOOKS of the last three months

TICKET TO RIDE

INSIDE THE BEATLES' 1964 AND 1965 TOURS

By Larry Kane *PENGUIN BOOKS, $14*

The Fab Four before fame, egos and acid took their toll.

CLUBLAND

THE FABULOUS RISE AND MURDEROUS FALL OF CLUB CULTURE

By Frank Owen *BROADWAY BOOKS, $15*

Coke-razor–sharp exposé of criminal shenanigans behind the velvet ropes.

Left, top to bottom: Bill Ray/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images; Steven Tackeff/Zuma/Corbis; Alphonse Telymonde (Tommyland)

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Never get liposuction in Tijuana

OOH MOMMY!

The outer-space splatter fest is back — and it's gorier than ever. By Jonah Weiner and Gabe Soria

DOOM III

ACTIVISIONL PC, XBOX

✪✪✪✪

RELEASED IN 1994, *Doom II* popularized hyperviolent first-person shooters, sold millions and became the scapegoat of choice for family-values pundits, conservative politicians and even Columbine parents, who (unsuccessfully) sued the game's developers in 2001. It was to video games what Marilyn Manson was to music.

Ten years later, Manson can't spook your grandma, and although the latest *Doom* isn't likely to raise eyebrows on Capitol Hill, it *has* returned as gruesome as ever. If there's one image more disturbing than a baby with rotting insect wings, deadened eyes and claws trying to maul you, it's emptying a chain gun into its face and watching it disintegrate, limb by limb. This is just one gory experience among many in a horror-action game *not* recommended to anyone interested in sleeping within 72 hours of playing it.

You play as a space marine who guns his way from a besieged Mars base into hell itself. The game's best feature is its enveloping darkness and constant unease: Wrench-wielding zombies spring from blackness; fireball-hurling imps tear through staircases the moment your foot grazes a step. This tension helps offset chaotic, button-mashing freak-outs, which have their own panicked appeal. One update is a PDA device that gives you mission objectives via e-mail. Now to find a way to block all that annoying spam about penis enlargement. . . .

John Lennon hours before his murder, with killer Mark David Chapman in background.

BAD INFLUENCES

Does entertainment incite murder and death?

MURDER!
The Catcher in the Rye
J.D. Salinger's 1951 book was found in the possession of Mark David Chapman after he murdered John Lennon and on foiled Ronald Reagan assassin John Hinckley.

SUICIDE!
Stained Class
Two teens in Nevada shot themselves in 1985 after listening to Judas Priest's 1978 album. One died, the other was left a disfigured wreck and later died of a drug overdose.

HAZING!
The Program
Two men died after attempting to copycat a scene from this 1993 college-football flick in which players undergo a novel hazing ritual: lying in the middle of oncoming traffic.

ASTROBOY

SEGA — PS2

With all the bright capes, utility belts and unitards, many superheroes look pretty damn silly. That's nothing compared to Astroboy, a world-saving kid robot who resembles Betty Boop's little brother. Huge in Japan's anime scene, he's deceptively bad-ass, zipping around on rocket feet and blasting foes with arm-mounted cannons. Like *Sonic the Hedgehog*, this is aimed at the Saturday-morning-cartoon set: annoyingly cutesy at points but high on eye-candy. ✪✪✪

HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!

SONY — PS2

Adapted from a multimillion-selling Japanese game, *Hot Shots Golf Fore!* is as cute as Hello Kitty, which may tee off those who prefer the tight-assed accuracy of Electronic Arts' Tiger Woods series. But with its challenging course, surreal sense of humor and acid-trip graphics (an adorable little bear is one of your caddy choices — awww!), Sony pulls off a minor feat: turning one of the world's most tedious pastimes into an enjoyable time-killer. ✪✪✪

SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM

KONAMI — PS2, XBOX

Blender is a sucker for any game with the disclaimer "May be considered violent or cruel." In the terrifyingly inscrutable horror franchise's newest sequel, your character is held prisoner in a squalid apartment, though by whom and why is a mystery. This dump comes with roommates, too — supernatural creatures burst out of hidey-holes to deliver skin-crawling frights. It comes as a relief to find out the only things living behind the stove are some cockroaches. ✪✪✪

TEST DRIVE: EVE OF DESTRUCTION

ATARI — PS2, XBOX

Eve of Destruction faithfully brings the knuckle-dragging world of destruction derbies to the living room. It isn't pretty — it's about as low-budget as the "sport" that serves as its inspiration — but smashing into a school bus with a hearse in an event called the "Suicide Race," all while listening to *Blender* favorites the Von Bondies on the soundtrack, offers a very strange kind of satisfaction. ✪✪✪

BLENDER APPROVED

The best GAMES of the last three months

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

THQ — XBOX

Based on a military training simulator, it's perfect for those too lazy to join the Army and get shot at for real.

MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

CAPCOM — PS2, GAMECUBE

A stern little cyborg blasts the holy heck out of outlandish enemies.

This page, bottom left: Bettmann/Corbis (John Lennon & Mark David Chapman). Opposite page, top: Joseph Cultice/Corbis Outline

WIN THIS MICROSYSTEM!

Is there anything this stereo can't do? No! Play your DVDs, CDs and even MP3s with the awesome JVC EX-A1 microsystem! Send us your puzzle and contact info by Oct. 5, 2004. We'll pick a winner at random and post their name at blender.com/crossword. Go to blender.com for official rules.

PENCIL ME IN!

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 18 Across!

BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

1 Beastie Boys' hit from *To the 5 Boroughs* (three words)
8 Modern-rock's Mouse, who urge you to float on
10 The Osbournes' son
11 They wrote a bittersweet symphony
13 The Smiths' singer, for short
14 Audioslave's Morello
16 D12 song setting the record straight about Eminem's role in the group (two words)
18 *America's Sweetheart* Courtney
20 17 Down's "blazing" solo hit from 2004 (two words)
21 Guitarist/hunter/shock-jock Nugent
23 Aussie '80s icons Midnight ___
24 Crunk rapper featured on Usher's "Yeah!" (two words)
26 Evanescence's Amy
27 Mike Skinner's *nom de rap*
29 "Don't Tell Me" you don't know this Canadian pop-punk chanteuse (two words)

DOWN

2 Cartoon dad who hosted his own Lollapalooza-esque show
3 The Man in Black
4 Nebraska city, home to Bright Eyes, Cursive et al.
5 Breakthrough single by 6 Down (three words)
6 Scottish post-punk popsters named after a WWI archduke (two words)
7 Guns N' Stone Temple Pilots? (two words)
9 Aerosmith's earliest hit "_____ On"
12 Lauper, who just wanted to have fun
15 Heavy-metal giants who had a beef with Napster
17 Rapper Lloyd _____ of 50 Cent's crew, G-Unit
19 Her heart will go on
22 Ooh-we-ooh, this band looks just like Buddy Holly
25 Singer-songwriter Mraz
28 The Wu-Tang Clan's in-house producer

→ Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018.

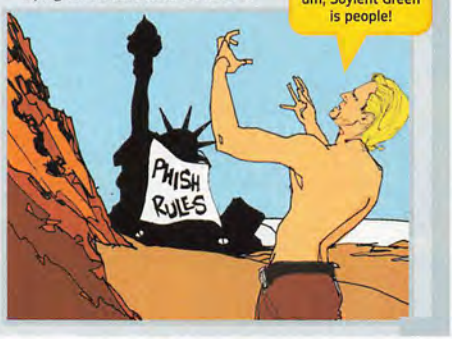
POP HISTORY! OCTOBER 2004: PHISH'S SPLIT CAUSES THE END OF THE WORLD

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS. ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

↓ At first it was foolishly believed that the break-up of jam-band icons Phish would impact only their fans.

↓ But the subsequent collapse in hacky-sack stocks triggered the worst stock-market crash since the Great Depression.

↓ A nuclear conflagration swiftly ensued, wiping out civilization as we know it.



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He's the 30-year-old rap star and MTV host who keeps a meticulous home, thinks our President is a "jerkoff" and never, ever wants to hear the phrase "Pimp my ride" again. *Blender* asks the existential question . . . .

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

WHO DOES XZIBIT THINK HE IS?

So the message of your drawing is, "Think outside the box"?
Basically. There are a lot of stereotypes that rappers are supposed to live up to, to be successful. And I don't live up to any of those.

C'mon, none of them?
Well, some of them. I'm a youngster, man. I smoke. I hang out with my friends. But I'm a father first. You've got to have a balance.

Ever been fired from a job?
I got fired from the Original Cookie Company. It was the only job I could get at the mall. I had a green apron and a fucking visor, doing little inscriptions on the cakes and giant cookies and shit, and my supervisor told me to do something, so I pushed him. He was a fucking prick. He fired me on the spot.

What's left after you've been fired from the Original Cookie Company?
After that, I started serving. I got into self-employment. You know, urban-pharmaceutical services.

When was the last time you got drunk?
Fourth of July weekend: I had friends over for a barbecue at home in California, and I was shit-faced. Hennessy's the drink: Hennessy and Coke. Let girls drink the wine and all of that vodka shit. Give me a bottle of Hennessy. That's what's up.

If you could apologize to one person, who would it be?
Ooh, I broke this guy's jaw at a nightclub, and I didn't need to hit him. He sued the fuck out of me, and he got some money, but I still feel bad about it, so I'd apologize to that guy. But it was a cold right hand! You should have seen it.

What does your mother call you?
When she was alive, she called me Alvin. That's my real name. I had to be in the house when the streetlights came on. All mothers did that in Detroit. You better be in the house, because dinner's ready to crack and *The Muppet Show* is on an hour after that.

"WE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT FROM BUSH: HE'S AN IDIOT."

Any other nicknames, Alvin?
My older sister called me "Dirtmizer" 'cause I didn't like to take baths. Then I figured out that hygiene has a lot to do with companionship. But see, I used to fuck with her, because she had a form of eczema on her neck. I was like, "Black neck, black neck. You fucking African-ass neck!"

Who are you voting for this year?
See, that's a crazy question. We know what to expect from Bush: He's a fucking idiot. We know he's a jerkoff. But we don't know what Kerry is about. I definitely can't vote for Bush, but I'm not thrilled with the second option, either.

What medication are you on?
I'm on the medication of life, daddy!

What phrase do you never want to hear again?
"Pimp my ride." People think they're the first ones to come up to me and say that. "That's not original. You're the 30 millionth person to say that to me!" Either that, or "nigger." I don't want to hear that ever again. [*Laughs*]

Have you ever been mistaken for someone else?
I had some guy in D.C. say I looked just like Jaheim. I damn near slapped the shit out of him.

What's your taste in sex?
I'm selective. I was childish at first: "Yeah, I'm getting a bunch of pussy." But you give a lot more of yourself than you get. My dick don't take up the time it used to.

Are you a good boy, or a bad boy?
I'm a good *guy*. I stopped being a boy a long time ago.

What's your astrological sign, and what does it say about you?
I'm a Virgo — a perfectionist. I have everything in order. I still make niggas take their shoes off when they come over. Don't scratch my shit up, you know?

Last question: Will you pimp my ride?
Oh, goddamn it! [BLENDER]

Prop styling by Shawn Patrick Anderson for JGK Inc.; wardrobe styling by Monica Morrow for Epiphany Ent.

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